



# JEEVADHARA

## THE BEATITUDES

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**Edited by**  
**Assisi Saldanha**

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Both incorrect and correct forms are given below:

### Article 1

#### Incorrect

*Ptôchoi*  
*Peinôntes*  
*ptôchos*  
*pençs*  
*tô(i)*  
*'am-hâ -'*  
*autôn*  
*Ptôcheia*  
*Ptôcheuô*

#### Correct

*Ptôchoi*  
*Peinôntes*  
*ptôchos*  
*penēs*  
*tō(i)*  
*'am-hā -'*  
*autōn*  
*Ptôcheia*  
*Ptôcheuō*

### Article 2

*Pentheô*  
*klaio*  
*paraclthçsonta*  
*parakaleô*  
*kaleô*

*Pentheō*  
*klaio*  
*paraclēthēsonta*  
*parakaleō*  
*kaleō*

### Article 3

*Prautçs*  
*ptôchos*  
*yârað*  
*klçronomçsousin*  
*tçn gçn*

*Prautēs*  
*ptôchos*  
*yāraś*  
*klēronomēsousin*  
*tēn gēn*

### Article 4

*dikaiousunç*  
*dipsôntes*  
*peinôntes*  
*chortazô*

*dikaiousunē*  
*dipsōntes*  
*peinōntes*  
*chortazō*

#### Incorrect

*chortasthçsesthe*  
*chortasthçsontai*  
*bârûk*  
*Peinaô*  
*Dipsaô*  
*dikç*

#### Correct

*chortasthēsesthe*  
*chortasthēsontai*  
*bārûk*  
*Peinaō*  
*Dipsaō*  
*dikē*

### Article 5

*dikaiousunç*  
*'âûâ*

*dikaiousunē*  
*'āsâ*

*eleçmones*  
*eleçthçsontai*  
*oiktirmôn*

*eleēmones*  
*eleēthēsontai*  
*oiktirmōn*

### Article 6


*ðâlôm*  
*Đâlôm*  
*eirçnç*  
*eirçnopoioi*  
*kaleô*

*šālôm*  
*Šālôm*  
*eirēnē*  
*eirēnopoioi*  
*kaleō*

### Article 7

*dediôgmenoi*  
*diôkô*  
*sdâqâ*  
*dikaiousunç*

*dediōgmenoi*  
*diōkō*  
*sdāqâ*  
*dikaiousunē*



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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

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## The Beatitudes

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## Editorial

The Beatitudes are at the very heart of the Sermon on the Mount (SM). Even though simply stated by Jesus, they have evoked diverse responses. They have been interpreted differently not only down the ages but also within an epoch itself. This is certainly true of today. In this issue on the Beatitudes we have scholars who try to interpret the various beatitudes for today from an exegetical base. Since the beatitudes are part of the SM and are related to each other in structure, there will be nuances that will naturally overlap. One will also find authors taking sometimes opposing views. Some questions that will occur frequently are: Must the beatitudes be treated as entrance requirements or eschatological blessings? That is, do they reflect grace and therefore serve as God's gift or must they be seen more as demands made on the disciples?

The basic form of the beatitudes is maintained throughout. There is a) an initial declaration that someone is happy followed by b) an adjective participle, or relative clause, usually in the third person that describes the behavior or attitudes of the happy individual and implicitly defines what makes for true happiness which ends with c) a promise introduced by 'for', that proclaims the rewards sure to attend such behavior and attitudes.<sup>1</sup> Very clearly the first and the last beatitudes form an *inclusio* since both reflect the same reward – 'the kingdom of heaven' stated in the present. Between these two are six beatitudes with promises made in the future tense. The question that frequently surfaces is whether the promise of blessing which in most cases, from the second to the seventh beatitude at least, is stated in the future, actually imply that the disciples must display no resistance to

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1 J.P. Meier, "Matthew 5:3-12," *Interpretation* 44 (1990) 282.

forces working against them. That is, put up with what comes your way here and now and God will reverse your lot in the next. Are the disciples being told to remain happy no matter what happens or is there another nuance to *makarios*? There always remains the problem of translating *makarios* either as blessed or happy. Are the disciples *blessed* in view of what they are called to be (poor in spirit, mourn, etc.) or are they subjectively happy on knowing beforehand that the eschatological blessing will come their way? One will find scholars for one reason or other making a different option.

According to the *first* beatitude, those who are poor in spirit already possess the kingdom of God. Happiness flows from this awareness and the poor consequently combine the depth dimension of mysticism and the breadth dimension of social liberation to become the proclaimers of the kingdom of God. The *eighth* Beatitude similarly makes the same promise to those persecuted for righteousness' sake. That is, the promise of the kingdom is made to them not so much because they *are* persecuted but because they are *committed* to righteousness in spite of being persecuted. They reveal themselves as worthy successors of Jesus and the prophets. The second to the seventh beatitudes also disclose a reversal of worldly schemes and machinations and the eschatological promises spur the disciples to agree to such a reversal.

The *second*, those who mourn do so because they do not conform to evil and resist worldly models of behavior. The world would want such to stop mourning and with it stop pricking the consciences of those who would rather keep them numbed.

The *third*, the meek in a gradual, mysterious, and unassuming way bring about a transformation of the world in that it is God who will bring to an end the present inequitable access to land, based on exploitative societal relationships, for the earth and its resources belong to him.

The *fourth*, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness desire both personal uprightness and social justice. Such a desire is born of knowing and doing God's will. The Indian religious term *dharma* seems to reflect this idea of righteousness we find in Matthew.



The *fifth*, the merciful realize that a radical mission of liberation from deprivation and misery must go hand in hand with a pastoral mission of forgiveness and reconciliation. There cannot be mercy devoid of concrete actions.

The *sixth*, purity of heart implies integrity of action. Those who have known the consolation of God have preserved their integrity whether they were subjected to the evil of persecution or to that of moral laxity. To have known God this way and to trust in his promises makes one happy. My own article on this beatitude entitled "Seeing God with a Pure Heart" is dropped for want of space.

The *seventh*, peace is the cry of the modern world. Peacemaking involves the pursuit of justice and reconciliation. But to establish peace there is need for commitment which is not easy, for it is a commitment to justice; and when justice prevails there is reconciliation which will lead to peace.

The beatitudes give orientation to the SM and as such they clearly endow all who accept to live by them a power to make a difference in the world. I hope this effort to reflect on the beatitudes will help those who read this work not only to understand the beatitudes better but also to live by them.

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The first of these is the fact that the human mind is not a passive recipient of impressions from the outside world, but an active agent which selects and interprets its impressions. This is the basis of all human knowledge and action.

The second point is that the human mind is not a single entity, but a complex of many different faculties. These faculties are the result of the interaction of the mind with the world, and they are constantly developing and changing.

The third point is that the human mind is not a static entity, but a dynamic one. It is constantly changing and developing, and it is always in the process of creating new ideas and concepts.

The fourth point is that the human mind is not a purely rational entity, but a creature of emotions and feelings. These emotions and feelings are an integral part of the mind, and they play a major role in the way we think and act.

The fifth point is that the human mind is not a purely individual entity, but a social one. We are born into a world of other people, and our minds are shaped by the interactions we have with them.

The sixth point is that the human mind is not a purely physical entity, but a spiritual one. There is something about the mind that goes beyond the physical, and it is this something that gives us the ability to think and feel.

The seventh point is that the human mind is not a purely mortal entity, but an immortal one. There is something about the mind that survives the death of the body, and it is this something that gives us the hope of life after death.

# “Poor in Spirit”: Matthean Jesus’ Vision for a New Society (Mt 5:3)

Thomas Valliyanipuram

The author argues that the praxis that Jesus puts forth in the beatitudes alone will initiate lasting renewal and transformation in the society because the strategy of Jesus links perfectly the depth dimension of mysticism and the breadth dimension of social liberation. According to the first beatitude, those who are poor in spirit already possess the kingdom of God. They become the protagonists and promulgators of the kingdom of God.

## Introduction

The Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12) impart God’s unconditional blessing and grace to all the suffering, afflicted and marginalized people of the world. Biblical God is a God who sees the agony of the destitute, hears the cry of the mourners, and who comes down to liberate the people from all kinds of bondage. This is the good news that Jesus preached two thousand years ago. Hence the beatitudes contain a new vision of God, a new vision of humans and a new vision of society. As Pope Benedict the XVI writes in his *Jesus of Nazareth*, “The beatitudes, spoken with the community of Jesus’ disciples in view, are paradoxes – the standards of the world are turned upside down as soon as things are seen in the right perspective, which is to say, in terms of God’s values, so different from those of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007, 71.

We feel the heartbeats of Jesus in the beatitudes. Jesus, who lived as a poor man, who identified himself with the wretched of the earth, proclaims blessedness and supreme happiness to the poor.<sup>2</sup> In this article my attempt is to explain the theological, prophetic and spiritual implications of the first beatitude of Matthew's gospel, "happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3).

### 1. The Literary Genre of the 'Beatitude'

Beatitude is a distinctive literary genre found both in Jewish and Hellenistic literature. Old Testament uses 'ašrê or bârûk as the key word to designate 'blessed' (Ps 1:1; Gen 30:13; Job 5:17; Eccles 25:8).<sup>3</sup> The equivalent Greek word is *makarios*. Beatitudes confer a blessing on those who live in conformity to the principles prescribed by God and the wise. A beatitude is essentially a declarative sentence. But it also contains hortative or parenetic elements. The declarative comes almost as a challenge or summons for the hearers to join the ranks of the blessed by meeting the implicit demands of the statement.<sup>4</sup>

Majority of the OT beatitudes appear in the Wisdom literature, especially in the Psalms and the Proverbs. They are mostly formed in the third person. They praise certain conduct and set it as a condition for blessing. Beatitudes occur in another literary genre namely the prophetic and apocalyptic literature (Dan 12:12; 1 Enoch 8:2-3). The apocalyptic beatitudes are addressed to those who live in great trials and tribulations. The beatitude pronounces blessing for them in the eschaton or the end of the age. The tone of these beatitudes is more that of consolation and assurance than that of parenetic exhortation.<sup>5</sup>

- 2 W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, Cambridge, University Press, 1964, 440, "The opening of the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes, recognizes man's infinite need for grace, his mercy; its absolute demand recognizes man's infinite moral possibilities, the grandeur."
- 3 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2007, 160, "The Hebrew equivalent of *makarios* is 'ašrê rather than the more theologically loaded bârûk, blessed by God."
- 4 R. A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?" *JBL* 95 (1976) 415-434, 417.
- 5 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 Vols., ICC, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1988, 1. 432.



What is the literary form that Matthew uses in his beatitudes? Is it wisdom type beatitude or apocalyptic type beatitude? It may appear that Matthew follows the apocalyptic type, but a closer look forbids us to limit the Matthean beatitude to the apocalyptic form. For Matthew, the blessing is connected not exclusively with eschaton. The poor in the spirit receive the kingdom here and now; those who suffer for righteousness experience the consolation of the kingdom at present itself. Moreover Matthew is interested in parenesis and exhortation, just like the wisdom teachers. Matthew values meekness, mercy, purity of heart and peace making. As H. D. Betz comments, "Like most beatitudes, those of the Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain have eschatological as well as this-worldly implications."<sup>6</sup> On the whole Matthew follows a literary form which combines the best elements of 'wisdom teaching' and 'apocalyptic hope'. Thus he delineates the way of life of the disciples of Jesus and gives a fitting introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. As J. P. Meier states, "apocalyptic and wisdom often flow together in Matthew."<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Importance of the First Beatitude

Among the eight beatitudes<sup>8</sup> of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, the first one is the most original and it stands as an introduction and summary of all the beatitudes. Among the beatitudes, the first four beatitudes stand as one block and they have unique importance. These four beatitudes specify the addressees by using the words beginning with Π (the letter 'P' in Greek) alliteration: *Ptôchoi*, *Penthountes*, *Praeis*, *Peinôntes*. The underlying Hebrew word for the Greek term *ptôchos* (poor) and *praeis* (meek) is *anawim*. Hence the first and third beatitudes are identical in Hebrew/Aramaic source. The mourners (second beatitude) and the hungry (fourth beatitude) are other terms which show the social predicament

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6 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, 96-97.

7 J. P. Meier, *Matthew*, NT Commentary Series-3, Dublin, Veritas Publications, 1980, 39.

8 The ninth beatitude in Mt 5:11-12 is an explanation of the eighth beatitude. Hence it is quite logical to consider the beatitudes as eight in number.

of the poor people. Thus the first four beatitudes are different versions or intensifications of the most fundamental biblical term 'poor'. Mercy, purity of heart, peace making, and suffering for the sake of righteousness, are, in fact, virtues, which a person who follows the spirituality of the 'poor in spirit' practices in his/her daily life.

### 3. Matthean and Lucan Forms of the First Beatitude

The Lucan beatitude reads thus: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Lk 6:20). The logion in the Gospel of Thomas is similar to Luke: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."<sup>9</sup>

At the outset we find two differences between the Lucan and Matthean forms: (1) The Lucan form uses second person plural, whereas the Matthean form has third person plural. (2) Matthew adds 'in spirit' to the 'poor', thus apparently spiritualized a more social-revolutionary statement. Matthean theology emphasizes humility, gentleness, and trust in God. His beatitude seems to stress the spiritual import of the beatitude rather than the social.<sup>10</sup> But shall we say that Matthew changed an original eschatological revolutionary statement of Jesus to fit his theology of meekness? The word *Ptôchoi* (poor) contains not only a sense of social depravity, but also the religious concept of attachment to God.<sup>11</sup> Matthew makes this addition to clarify the spiritual connotation already hidden in the word *Ptôchoi*. The Hebrew/Aramaic word *anawim* also implies both the social change of the *status quo* and the spiritual yearning for God. Hence the Matthean form of the first beatitude brings out the double meaning - both social and spiritual - of the beatitude rather than the Lucan form, which emphasizes only the social aspect. Though Luke preserves the original form, Matthew gives the full meaning of the beatitude. As E. Schweizer writes, "Matthew has been more insightful about

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9 B. D. Ehrman, "The Coptic Gospel of Thomas," logion 54, *The Lost Scriptures*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, 19-28, 24.

10 J. P. Meier, *Matthew*, 39.

11 G. Bornkamm, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, London, SCM Press, 1963, 125.

what Jesus said than Lûke, who merely translates Jesus' dictum literally into Greek."<sup>12</sup>

Behind the Matthean and Lucan forms, we find the Isaian text, declaring the blessing of the messianic era. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of God's favour" (Isa 61: 1-2). Jesus, the Messiah inaugurates the messianic era of liberation and salvation through the beatitudes.

#### 4. Exegetical Analysis of the First Beatitude

*Makaríoi hoi ptôchoi to pneumati*

*Hoti autôn estin he basileia tôn ouranôn*

O, how happy are the poor in spirit

Because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Here we are confronted by some questions:

- (1) Does *ptôchos* refer to economic poverty?
- (2) Or is it used as a spiritualized metaphor, signifying the meaning of a mental state of deprivation and detachment to material possessions without the meaning of material depravity?
- (3) Is the dative of '*to pneumati*' instrumental or referential?
- (4) Does spirit (*pneuma*) refer to human spirit or divine spirit?

##### a) *Material Poverty or Metaphorical Poverty*

In contrast to *ptôchos* which refers to complete destitution,<sup>13</sup> there is another word *pençs* that denotes not abject poverty but dearth of property. *Ptôchoi* seek the help of the other by begging. Therefore, *ptôchos* is the strongest expression of social poverty. *pençs* has to work, but *ptôchos* has to beg.<sup>14</sup> Matthew uses not *pençs*, but

12 E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, London, SPCK, 1975, 88.

13 E. Bammel, "art. *ptôchos*, *Ptôcheia*, *Ptôcheuô*," in *TDNT*, 6.885-915, 887.

14 H. Merkley, "art. *ptôchos*, *Ptôcheia*, *Ptôcheuô*," in *EDNT*, 3.193-195, 194.

*Ptôchoi*.<sup>15</sup> He understands the poor as totally destitute, who live like beggars without any material possessions at all. These poor people are completely at the mercy of others. He wanted to emphasize the misery of poverty by carefully avoiding the word, *pençs*, and using the word, *Ptôchoi*. The main Hebrew equivalent to *ptôchos*, which occurs some 100 times in the LXX, is 'ani. It denotes a state of lowliness or distress and hence a man in a state of reduced competence and lesser worth. In that sense it refers predominantly to poverty.<sup>16</sup> Other Hebrew terms are *dal* and 'ebiyon. *Dal* means lowly, poor, wretched or insignificant and 'ebiyon means one who seeks alms or beggar. So the main Hebrew words that stand behind *ptôchos* are 'ani, *dal* and 'ebiyon. In LXX, *ptôchos* and *pençs* are used interchangeably to translate the above Hebrew terms.

There is a historical development for the term 'ani. Originally the word designated the destitute and lowly people of the land. However, early on they receive special patronage and protection (Lev 25:1-17; Deut 15:1-11). But with the coming of the monarchy, Israel lost its egalitarian and fraternal conception of society. It is at such a time that the prophets took the cause of the poor and fought against the exploitation of the rich. Amos, Hosea, Micah, Proto Isaiah and Jeremiah are hailed as the prophets of social justice. In the post-exilic times, the people who came back to Palestine after enduring great humiliation and tribulation in the foreign land were literally poor. They had to face many problems when they started rebuilding the temple and the nation. They looked to Yhwh in filial trust. Slowly there evolved the piety of the poor. We see this in Second Isaiah and Zephaniah and also in the Psalms and the Wisdom literature. There is a cry to God for help. The term 'poor' acquired a religious meaning: the suffering people are those who trust in Yhwh and rely on him in their utter hopelessness.

Together with the word, 'ani and 'aniyyim (the plural of 'ani), another word 'anaw also came into the current usage. This new

15 *ptôchos* occurs 34 times in the NT: 20 times in Synoptic Gospels, 4 times in John, 4 times in Pauline Letters, and twice in Revelation.

16 E. Bammel, "art. *ptôchos*, *Ptôcheia*, *Ptôcheuô*," in TDNT, 6.889.



word 'anaw without denying the social aspect of poverty emphasizes the religious meaning of poverty.<sup>17</sup> So the 'anawim (the plural of 'anaw) are humble and lowly people who depend on God. Many of the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical writings stressed this religious aspect of 'anawim. Some times they speak of *ptôchos* in a manner identical with *dikaïos* (righteous, Ecclus 13:17-18). In the Qumran literature, the community identified itself as 'ebiyon or 'ani. In the *War Scroll* of Qumran, we find the expression poor in spirit (1 QM 14:7; also 1 QH 14:3). The Qumranites saw themselves as the poor whom God had redeemed by his grace. They speak of themselves as 'poor in spirit' to enforce their sectarian consciousness. The Matthean Jesus, in contrast to Qumran, does not restrict his summons to salvation to a 'sacred remnant' in Israel but addresses all in Israel who are conscious of their human wretchedness and who surrender to divine mercy.<sup>18</sup>

In the NT, generally the term *ptôchos*, and, not *pençs*, is used to designate the poor. The word *ptôchos* implicitly includes the religious meaning of poor, which slowly evolved in the post-exilic period of Judaism. The poor are those who, realizing their own fragility and the illusory nature of human support, look to Yhwh alone for safety. The Matthean addition of 'in spirit' thus brings out the religious implication already implied in the word 'anawim or *ptôchoi*.<sup>19</sup>

### b) 'To Pneumati' – the Significance of the Dative

What is the special function of the dative 'tô(i) *pneumati*'? The dative can be taken either as instrumental or as referential. If it is taken as instrumental, then the translation will be 'poor through the spirit' or 'poor by the effect of the spirit.' This translation is awkward

17 E. Gerstenberger, "art. 'anah, 'ani, 'anaw," in *TDOT*, 11.230-252, 242, Most scholars believe that the plurals 'aniyyim and 'anawim always existed side by side, even though they were often confused. We can possibly discern a conscious development in which 'aniyyim = poor and 'anawim = humble, devout; but the distinction should not be pressed.

18 R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2007, 47.

19 H. Merklein, "art. *ptôchos*, *Ptôcheia*, *Ptôcheuô*," in *EDNT*, 3.193-195, 194.

and non-Matthean. The dative of reference is Matthean (5:8; 6:28; 6:25 etc.) and this may be the suitable translation for Mt 5:3: 'the poor with reference to spirit' or 'poor in spirit.' In this interpretation, 'spirit' can never be divine spirit, but only human spirit. Hence the dative of reference shows poverty as an attitude of the soul. By the addition '*tô(i) pneumatî*' Matthew shifts the emphasis from material poverty to spiritual poverty, without denying the material aspect of *ptôchos*. The expression may mean those poor who have no arrogance and who acknowledge their nothingness before God. They consider every thing as a gift from God and wholeheartedly trust in God. They are humble people. Thus sometime poor in spirit is interpreted as humble.<sup>20</sup>

### c) Spirit – Divine Spirit or Human Spirit?

The expression, *tô(i) pneumatî*, contains the word '*pneuma*.' However, it could possibly refer to the Holy Spirit only if the dative is taken as instrumental, in which case there would be a stress on poverty by the action of the Holy Spirit. Such an interpretation paved the way for taking 'poor in spirit' as a reference to the vow of voluntary poverty that the religious and monks profess before God. Thus it is quoted as Lord's command in monastic rules. However, opting for the referential meaning makes the above interpretation unacceptable because here the beatitude is addressed not exclusively to religious, clerics and monks but to all Christians. Surely spirit here refers to human spirit and not to Holy Spirit or divine spirit.

## 5. Interpretation of the Text (Mt 5:3)

Scholars interpret the first beatitude differently. There are at least three interpretations we may look at.

### a) Spiritual or Mystical Interpretation

The first type of interpretation favoured by majority of the Fathers of the church and many modern scholars is that the beatitude concerns spiritual poverty or humility. According to them, spiritually poor refers to the inner attitude to riches: one should not set one's confidence on

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20 U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1989, 233-34.

riches. In principle the rich are just as blessed as the poor, for there is no distinction of persons before God. What matters is our attitude to material possessions and our interior disposition before God. The interpretation emphasizes trust in God, dependence on God and humility. It internalizes poverty. It prepares the mind for mystical union with God. H. D. Betz,<sup>21</sup> R. T. France,<sup>22</sup> M. Fallon,<sup>23</sup> D. R. A. Hare,<sup>24</sup> R. Schnackenburg,<sup>25</sup> D. E. Garland<sup>26</sup> are some of the important scholars who favour a spiritual interpretation of the first beatitude.

### ***b) Prophetic or Social Interpretation***

The second type of interpretation focuses on the *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus and his liberative messianic work. Jesus addresses specially the 'am-hâ -'arets (the people of the land) who are oppressed by the rich landlords, the aristocracy, the religious leaders and the powerful Roman political overlords. The 'poor' in the beatitude refers to persons living in social and economic misery. Jesus never advocated material poverty. On the other hand, he summons all people to work for the eradication of poverty and deprivation. The first beatitude is a prophetic protest against all kinds of unjust structures of the society, which support poverty, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. According to W. Carter,<sup>27</sup> the poor are not to be spiritualized by either softening the referent or making it figurative. They are literally the poor and the destitute. Jesus instills hope in them and he envisions a new humanity where there is no poverty or oppression. For G. Gutierrez "the poor are blessed because the coming of the kingdom will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of brotherhood."<sup>28</sup>

21 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 115-116.

22 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 165.

23 M. Fallon, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Bangalore, ATC, 2002, 87.

24 D. R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Louisville, John Knox Press, 1993, 37.

25 R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 47.

26 D. E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, New York, Crossroad, 1995, 55.

27 W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins. A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 2000, 131-132.

According to G. M. Soares-Prabhu, "Jesus proclaims the poor 'blessed,' not because their poverty is a good thing, but precisely because it is an evil, which he is about to bring to an end. The poor are blessed because they are to be the beneficiaries of the total revolution that the kingdom of God will bring."<sup>29</sup>

### c) *Prophetic cum Spiritual Interpretation*

The third type of interpretation proposes a happy blending of both the prophetic and spiritual interpretations. We have seen that the word *ptôchos* is very strong and it depicts the pathetic situation of a poor person who lacks even the basic necessities of life. Through this term Matthew visualizes the poor and the downtrodden people of the society. Thus he retains the original meaning of Jesus' proclamation. Matthew also emphasizes the apocalyptic reversal. The poor in spirit, the mourners, and the hungry people will get liberation, consolation and satiation. The kingdom of God has already arrived through the ministry of Jesus. Hence the apocalyptic reversal is not some thing that pertains to a distant future but to the here and now in the community. At the same time by attaching the phrase, 'in spirit', Matthew brings out the spirituality of '*anawim Yhwh* that is inherent in the biblical term, 'poor'. Thus Matthew asserts that the first beatitude includes both the prophetic (social) and spiritual (mystical) meanings.

Today many Matthean scholars favour a 'both-and' interpretation of the first beatitude. According to J. P. Meier,<sup>30</sup> the 'poor in spirit' are the poor who clamour for liberation. Matthew has added 'in spirit' to specify the religious piety of this poor and suffering people. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison state that the religious meaning of the poor in Matthew does not exclude the economic meaning. Rather, the two

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28 G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1973, 298-99.

29 G. M. Soares-Prabhu, "Good News to the Poor: The Social Implications of the Message of Jesus," in F. X. D'Sa *et al.* (eds.), *Collected Writings: A Biblical Theology for India*, Pune, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999, 2. 256-271, 266.

30 J. P. Meier, *Matthew*, 39.



go together.<sup>31</sup> According to F. D. Bruner the first beatitude incorporates both spirituality and sociality.<sup>32</sup>

#### *d) Our Interpretation of the Text*

We have seen three types of interpretation of the first Matthean beatitude. The first view stresses the mystical or spiritual meaning of the beatitude. According to this, poor in spirit means the humble that depend on God. The second interpretation focuses on the prophetic and social dimension of the teaching of Jesus. According to this view, poor in spirit means those who work with God for the eschatological reversal here and now in the society by eradicating poverty and oppression and creating a new order of peace, fraternity and prosperity. The third interpretation emphasizes both the spiritual dimension and prophetic perspective. Accordingly, the poor in spirit are those who humbly depend on God, practicing detachment from worldly possessions, identifying themselves with the poor and working for their liberation from all kinds of bondages of poverty and oppression. We uphold this third interpretation. This is a life-vision and Jesus Christ himself is our great example for this way of life. He totally depended on his heavenly Father. He identified himself with the poor people of the land. He worked for their integral liberation and salvation. For Jesus, the concept of poor in spirit is not merely a spiritual attitude, but praxis of social action. Just as Jesus practiced the vision of the poor in spirit two thousand years ago, we as his disciples are called to practice this in the current realities of Indian society. It demands a paradigm shift in all our perspectives and activities. A pro-poor church that works for the integral liberation of the marginalized alone can witness effectively among the people of India the evangelical value of 'poor in spirit'. Are we ready to empty ourselves from the comfort of institutionalization to the powerlessness of solidarity with the poor? Are we ready to eschew the oppressive attitudes of luxury, domination, and arrogance and work for the building up of a new humanity of

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31 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1. 443.

32 F. D. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 2 Vols., Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1987, 1. 159.

love and fellowship? 'Poor in spirit' demands the depth dimension of the spirituality of the '*anawim Yhwh* and the breadth dimension of the prophetic involvement in the society for its liberation and betterment.

## 6. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

Kingdom of heaven/God is an important term in the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew favours the expression 'kingdom of heaven' rather than 'kingdom of God' because of his Jewish predilections. But there is no difference in meaning between these terms. The biblical term *basileia tou theou* (kingdom of God) does not connote a territory but the reign of God. According to the narratives in the gospels, kingdom of God has both realized and futuristic dimensions. It has begun in the salvific works of Jesus. But the fullness of the kingdom will be realized only in the eschatological times.

The first beatitude in Matthew emphasizes that the poor in spirit already possess the kingdom of God. It is not a divine reward promised to men to be received in the after life, but a state of life to be enjoyed here and now. Then what precisely is the kingdom, which the poor in spirit possess? It is the new dispensation of the reign of God where every body accepts God as the Father and all humans live as brothers and sisters. It is a world order based on the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of humans.<sup>33</sup> The church is entrusted to work for the realization of the kingdom in every spectrum of human society. According to the first beatitude, those who are poor in spirit already possess the kingdom of God and become the protagonists and promulgators of the kingdom of God.

## Conclusion

Through the paradoxical language of the beatitudes Jesus envisions a new world and a new society, where there is no poverty, deprivation, discrimination or exploitation. This new society is characterized by peace, fraternity, equality, solidarity and prosperity. It is founded on the reign of God. It demands spiritual depth and social liberation. This new society is a community of persons that accepts God both as

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33 L. Sabourin, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 2 Vols., Bombay, St. Paul's, 1982, 1. 107.

Father and as the ground of its being. Such a community depends on him in filial trust and prayer. Down through the centuries, humans witnessed many revolutions for the liberation and upliftment of the poor people of the world. But many of them failed because of their one-sided approach to social problems. The praxis that Jesus puts forth in the beatitudes alone will initiate lasting renewal and transformation in the society because the strategy of Jesus links perfectly the depth dimension of mysticism and the breadth dimension of social liberation. This is the unique contribution of Jesus Christ, the greatest teacher, for the true progress and prosperity of the human race.

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# Happiness of the Mourners! (Mt 5:4)

Jose Maniparampil

Those who do not conform to evil and resist models of behavior, that they are pressured to accept because 'everyone does it', will mourn but they are happy. The world cannot tolerate this kind of resistance; it demands conformity. It considers this mourning to be an accusation directed against the numbing of consciences. And so it is. That is why those who suffer persecution will mourn for the sake of righteousness and put things to rights. This is the strength to accept sorrow and oppose oppression with the conviction that God is with them.

## Introduction

One harvest day Jesus called us and his other friends to the hills. The earth was fragrant, and like the daughter of a king at her wedding feast, she wore all her jewels. And the sky was her bridegroom. When he reached the heights Jesus stood still in the grove of laurels, and he said, "Rest here, quiet your mind and tune your heart, for I have much to tell you." Then he reclined on the grass, and the summer flowers were all about us, and Jesus sat in our midst and said:

"Blessed are they who remember their pain, and in their pain await their joy."

This is a scene from *Jesus the Son of Man* written by Kahlil Gibran.<sup>1</sup> His inspired portrayal of Christ depicts the paradoxical truth of blending of happiness with mourning.

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1 K. Gibran, *Jesus the Son of Man*, London, Penguin Books, 1997, 40.



Happy are those who mourn (Mt 5:4)! Happy are those who weep now (Lk 6:21)! It sounds ridiculous! It looks paradoxical since the society likes to wine and dine! If they mourn how are they happy? If they are happy why should they weep?

Usually this beatitude is interpreted as the godly sorrow, which works out true repentance over sins.<sup>2</sup> But this interpretation is far from the mind of Jesus, though this is not excluded. Nor is this “mourning” to be taken loosely for that feeling which is wrung from human beings under pressure of the ills of life. If then, what is the meaning of this *dominical logion*? To get into the depth we have to learn the gospel context, source of the beatitude and meaning of words employed.

### 1. Matthew's Gospel – the Last Book of the Old Testament

Strictly speaking, Matthew did not write a gospel, but “a book of the family history of Jesus” (Mt 1:1).<sup>3</sup> Why did he name his literary work as a book and not a gospel? Matthew did not think of writing a gospel which would be a part of the NT, but the last book of the *TaNaK*. In the words of C. H. Talbert, “Matthew's Gospel is also Judaism...Matthew's self-understanding was not that of a Christian but a Jew.”<sup>4</sup>

Matthew wrote his literary work at a time when Jewish Rabbis in Jamnia started the process of fixing the canon of the *TaNaK* (ca. 90 CE). Until then, there was no official list of accepted books. This gave Matthew a chance to write the last book of the OT. He re-reads the *TaNaK* with the key of the Christ-event and he asks readers to understand Christ against the background of the *TaNaK*.<sup>5</sup> A

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2 R. Bultmann, “art. *Penthos, Pentheô*,” in *TDNT*, 6.40-43, 43. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, AB, New York, Doubleday, 1971, 46.

3 J. Maniparampil, “The Plot of the Gospel of Mark,” *Sanyasa* 3 (2008) 151-64.

4 C. H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2004, 5.

5 A. J. Saldarini, “Delegitimation of Leaders in Matthew 23,” *CBQ* 54 (1992) 659-80, 668. C. H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 51.

statement of Jesus now becomes intelligible, "I have come not to cancel the *Torah* or the *Nebiim*, but complete it with the last book in the *Ketubim* (Mt 5:17). Yet, Matthew's gospel is not merely completion, but a fulfillment that brings a higher righteousness, "that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Mt 5:20). What is this higher righteousness? It is spelt out in the beatitudes.

## 2. The Purpose and Meaning of the Beatitudes

In Wisdom literature, a beatitude was meant "to commend the proposed path of goodness" (Prov 14:21; Ps 41:1; Sir 31:8). In the Prophets, it served to "express confidence in God's intervention to put to rights the present unhappy situation" (Is 30:18; Jer 17:7-8; Dan 12:12).<sup>6</sup> In the Torah, deliverance from slavery is celebrated with a beatitude (Deut 33:29). In the NT, the Sermon on the Mount with the beatitudes at the overture is "the manifesto for a program by which Jesus obtained initial success by gathering around himself the poor, the hungry, the meek, the oppressed and the persecuted."<sup>7</sup> Jesus announced a gospel, which is *good news* for certain people. Who are they? Beatitudes are the answer.

Beatitude (from Latin *beati*) is to be distinguished from blessing. The Greek word used by Matthew is *makarios*, and it means "fortunate", "happy" or "in a privileged situation". It could be a pronouncement of congratulations. In the Hellenistic world, *makarios* denotes inner happiness.<sup>8</sup> In the OT (Ps 1:1; Sir 14:20) it took on a religious sense as the expression of God's favor toward persons.<sup>9</sup> Jesus' beatitudes articulate "what kingdom-ready people should be like"<sup>10</sup> and what the meaning of discipleship is.<sup>11</sup> They are the "road

6 J. Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, WBC, Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1989, 280.

7 A. Leske, "Matthew," *The International Bible Commentary*, Bangalore, TPI, 1998, 1317-96, 1336.

8 J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, AB, New York, Doubleday, 1970, 632.

9 *Ibid.*

10 C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1999, 167.

11 J. Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth* (E. Tr. by Adrian J. Walker), New York, Doubleday, 2007, 73.

map for the Church, which recognizes in them the model of what she herself should be.”<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Sources of the Beatitudes

Though there are differences of voice with regard to the nature of dependency on the sources, scholars admit that Matthew and Luke borrowed from a common discourse source, the Q. Scholars also agree that Matthew has heavily drawn on Is 61:2b in the formulation of the beatitude of the mourners.<sup>13</sup> Just as the first beatitude draws its inspiration from Is 61, so does the third macarism. Prophesying the nature of messiah’s ministry, Isaiah says, “He has anointed me...to comfort all who mourn...” In the Isaian context, the community laments the desolation of the holy city (Cf. Is 3:6). This community does not resign itself to the present condition of the world as final, but laments the fact that God’s kingdom has not yet come.<sup>14</sup> Isaiah’s mission involves comforting those who mourn in Zion.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the exile, God would comfort the people (Is 40:1-2) by establishing his reign in Zion (Is 52:7).<sup>16</sup> Jesus explained his ministry in the programmatic speech by quoting the words of Isaiah (61:1-3; Lk 4:18-22), which is also echoed in the beatitudes.

### 4. Beatitudes and Hebrew Poetic Format

Jesus’ beatitudes, though appear to be spontaneous and original, are actually steeped in the OT allusions and therefore, cannot claim absolute originality. They have a Hebrew poetic format, which does not use rhyming words but rhyming ideas. Complementary descriptions are written in parallel, line by line, and by knowing the flow and drift of rhythmic idea we enter into the heart of the poem. This adds helpful insights for translation through word equivalence, and interpretation of difficult phrases by comparison with an easier one.

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12 *Ibid.*, 74.

13 B. T. Viviano, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” in R. E. Brown *et al.* (eds.), *NJBC*, Bangalore, TPI, 2002, 630-74, 640.

14 M. E. Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *NIB*, 8.179.

15 D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1991, 79.

16 A. Leske, “Matthew,” 1336.

Therefore, the beatitudes don't stand on their own but are arranged in pairs.<sup>17</sup> Barring the controversy over the number of the beatitudes, we follow the transposed order of verses 4 and 5 as seen in many Greek New Testament and Latin Vulgate manuscripts.

According to this parallelism, the poor are further explained as the meek and those that mourn are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake. The merciful are further specified by the phrase "the pure in heart". The peacemakers are described as those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

## 5. An Analysis of Terms

Major terms in the Matthean version of this supposedly third beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:4), are in Greek *makarios*, *penthein*, and *paraclēthēsontai*.

### a) *Blessed*

The word *makarioi* is best rendered as one "to be congratulated" in a deeply religious sense and with more emphasis on divine approval than on human happiness. *Makarios* is not a blessing of God, but a praise of God for being in that condition. Beatitudes do not indicate a psychological state, but they serve as a commendation of the "one who has accepted the demands of God's kingdom."<sup>18</sup> Jesus did not pronounce a blessing on the poor or those who mourn, but congratulated them. He praised them for their conduct or quality of life;<sup>19</sup> they are the privileged, in fortunate circumstance.<sup>20</sup> Jesus' kingdom, the nearness of which gives rise to a cry of joy,<sup>21</sup> is a contrast society where there is a reversal of worldly values- everything is to be turned upside down because the long-awaited reign of God is dawning.<sup>22</sup> The general value system is reversed by pronouncing the

17 J. Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 283.

18 R. T. France, *Matthew*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1985, 108-09.

19 R. F. Collins, "Beatitudes," in *ABD*, 1. 629-31, 629.

20 M. E. Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 8.176.

21 B. T. Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew," 640.

22 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, 53.



poor, the hungry and the mourning as the privileged ones in his kingdom.<sup>23</sup>

### **b) Those who Mourn**

The phrase *hoi penthountes* (verb *penthein*) is translated as “those who mourn.”<sup>24</sup> The noun *penthos* means both “sorrow” and “grief”. It could be either inner feeling (sorrow of the heart) or expression in an act (a lament) or it could be a passionate grief that leads to corresponding action (tears).<sup>25</sup> Mourning is grief and sorrow caused by profound loss, usually associated with death (Gen 23:2; 37:34-35; 2 Sam 13:37; 19:1). It represents the deepest heart-felt grief, experiencing sadness as the result of depressing circumstances. The term *klaiô* (“weep”) in Luke “can mean any loud expression of pain or sorrow... (Joel 1:5, 18; Is 22:4, 30:19; 33:7; Jer 9:1; 13:17).”<sup>26</sup>

There are two types of mourning: the first is the kind that involves a loss of hope, that has become mistrustful of love and of truth, and that therefore eats away and destroys man from within. But there is also the mourning occasioned by the shattering encounter with truth, which leads man to undergo conversion and to resist evil. This mourning heals, because it teaches humans to hope and to love again. Judas, struck with the horror of his own fall, is an example of the former and Peter, struck by the Lord’s gaze and bursts into healing tears that plow up the soil of his soul, is the best example of the latter.<sup>27</sup>

### **c) Shall be Comforted**

The Greek word *paraclēthēsontai* is translated “shall be comforted”. It is derived from the verb *parakaleô*, with *para* (“side”) and *kaleô* (“to call”), so that *paraclēthēnai* literally means “to be called to one’s side”. This refers to the act of calling someone to

23 M. E. Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 8.176.

24 R. Bultmann, “art. *Penthos*, *Pentheô*,” in *TDNT*, 6.40.

25 *Ibid.*, 42.

26 L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, SP, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1991, 107.

27 J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 86.

one's side for help. This means to "comfort", "cheer up", "to console", or "to encourage". In Greek it gained a legal nuance such as "legal adviser", "pleader", "a proxy", or an "advocate". The Hebrew equivalent is *nhm*, which means "console oneself", "be relieved", "be comforted". Isaiah speaks of true comfort for God's people since "her warfare is done, and her iniquity is pardoned" (40:1-2). In the Talmud, the Messiah was known as "comforter" (*Menahem*). Comfort is courage due to their position under the protective wings of God. The English word "comfort" derived from the Latin, where the word properly conveys the idea of strength: *con-fortis*. This is the strength to accept sorrow and oppose oppression with the conviction that God is with them.

## 6. Happiness of the Mourners

The blessing of the mourners is to be interpreted eschatologically. But, as J. Ratzinger puts it, "this must not, however, be taken to mean that the joy they proclaim is postponed until some infinitely remote future or applies exclusively to the next world. When a man begins to see and to live from God's perspective, when he is a companion on Jesus' way, then he lives by new standards, and something of the eschaton, of reality to come, is already present."<sup>28</sup> The beatitude takes up the prophetic promises and refers plainly to those who see this suffering *aeon* as it is and who are not led astray by its charms like "those who laugh" (Lk 6:25). The mourning of these humans is a sign of their demarcation from this *aeon* and of their expectation of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>29</sup>

God, conceived as an oriental king,<sup>30</sup> is the protector and defender of the poor.<sup>31</sup> The just reign of a king is judged by the standard of his care for the poor.<sup>32</sup> God must necessarily act on behalf of the poor, the hungry and those who mourn. Jesus' availability to these sections

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28 *Ibid.*, 72.

29 R. Bultmann, "art. *Penthos, Pentheō*," in *TDNT*, 6.43.

30 B. T. Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew," 640.

31 R. A. Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *NIB*, 9.143.

32 R. F. Collins, "Beatitudes," 630.

of the society is the concrete proof that God has ultimately acted. The scandal of the ministry of Jesus was the scandal of his reign.<sup>33</sup> The kingdom brings a reversal of fortunes. In other words, God's presence, advocacy, and redemptive work are seen among the poor.<sup>34</sup> The "original beatitudes about the 'poor', the 'mourners', and the 'hungry' express Jesus' mission to the needy in Israel and the dawn of a new era in salvation history."<sup>35</sup>

Yet, it is not realized in full. Matthew "taps into the deep biblical tradition that one of the characteristics of the true people of God is that they lament the present condition of God's people and God's program in the world."<sup>36</sup> God's kingdom should come in every epoch of time. Therefore, there should be mourners, who are "people who do not run with the pack, who refuse to collude with the injustice that has become endemic, but who suffer under it instead."<sup>37</sup> Oppression is not normative; it should be mourned.<sup>38</sup> The mourners are "sensitive to evil, to the world's rebellion against God and the world's suffering in consequence."<sup>39</sup> They are "those who are brokenhearted over their situation."<sup>40</sup> They mourn because "until the eschatological reversal takes place, it is not possible to be content with the *status quo*."<sup>41</sup> They mourn because they see evil reign on earth.<sup>42</sup> They represent a culture of inner freedom to counter a culture of affluence and thereby create conditions for social justice.<sup>43</sup> They mourn evil

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33 R. A. Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," 9.143.

34 *Ibid.*

35 B. T. Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew," 640.

36 M. E. Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 8.179.

37 J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 86.

38 W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margin. A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, Bangalore, TPI, 2007, 132.

39 L. Morris, *Luke*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1986, 127.

40 C. H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 51.

41 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew 1-7*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1988, 448.

42 B. T. Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew," 640.

43 J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 77.

doers (Ps 34:11), the powerful elite (Is 3:26; Jer 4:28). They, like Rachel (Mt 2:18), mourn the misrule of God's world by the devil's agents such as Herod the Great (Mt 2:16).<sup>44</sup> *They do not mourn over their sins*, but lament the destructive impact of the imperial powers and misrule of God's kingdom by devil's agents, like Babylon, Rome or, in today's world, any Superpower, who colonize nations and oppress the people. Any alliance with them could turn out to be cataclysmic. They mourn over it and their mourning "sets bounds to the power of evil."<sup>45</sup> They weep because they are the unfortunate and feel the pain of empty stomach,<sup>46</sup> feel the hurts resulting from sheer injustice because of the highhandedness of the powerful. The mourners "are people who do not flaunt their achievements before God."<sup>47</sup>

The mourners are people "who do not harden their hearts to the pain and need of others, who do not give evil entry to their souls, but suffer under its power and so acknowledge the truth of God- they are the ones who open the windows of the world to let the light in."<sup>48</sup> They are "the suffering, those whose life is, from a worldly point of view, an unhappy one, and particularly those who suffer for their loyalty to God."<sup>49</sup>

The beatitude is to be interpreted in its interconnectedness with the other. This beatitude may be paired with "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6) which in turn is connected to the eighth beatitude, "blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..." (5:10). In the face of dire needs, they hunger and thirst to see right prevail or to do what is right. To "hunger and thirst for righteousness" is not merely a longing for personal holiness, but it is a serious effort to end oppression and to bring the rule of

44 W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 132.

45 J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 87.

46 R. E. Brown, *New Testament Essays*, Garden City, Image Books, 1968, 336.

47 J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 76.

48 *Ibid.*, 87.

49 R. T. France, *Matthew*, 109.



justice to prevail in the land (Prov 14:34). It is a vital attempt to put things to rights.

But, it is always risky. As Pope Benedict XVI puts it rightly, “the mourning of which the Lord speaks is nonconformity with evil; it is a way of resisting models of behavior that the individual is pressured to accept because ‘everyone does it’. The world cannot tolerate this kind of resistance; it demands conformity. It considers this mourning to be an accusation directed against the numbing of consciences. And so it is. That is why those who mourn suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness.”<sup>50</sup> They “do not bow to the diktat of the prevailing opinions and customs, but resist it by suffering.”<sup>51</sup> They are “on the lookout, who are in search of something great, of true justice, of the true good.”<sup>52</sup>

The beatitudes “are not practical advice for successful living, but prophetic declarations made on the conviction of the coming-and-already-present kingdom of God.”<sup>53</sup> In God’s “visitation of the people” there is effected a great reversal. Human security and complacency is challenged by the Good News. Those who are powerful, rich, and “consoled” are themselves “cast down”, or “lowered”, or in the end, “cut off from the people”. Those ordinarily deemed unworthy, lowly, marginal or even outcast are accepted by God and “raised up”. The laughter of the mourners (Luke) is the joy that the kingdom of God will bring into the lives of those human beings.<sup>54</sup> Apart from all human endeavors, and in spite of all opposition, God inaugurates a new situation. In the midst of poverty, hunger and weeping, the kingdom is present in those who turn to Jesus right now.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, their comfort is actually a “standing under the protection of God’s power, secure in his love.”<sup>56</sup>

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50 J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 87-88.

51 *Ibid.*, 90.

52 *Ibid.*

53 M. E. Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 8.177.

54 J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, 634.

55 F. Noel, “Luke,” *The International Bible Commentary*, Bangalore, TPI, 1998, 1434-1511, 1462.

56 J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 88.

## Conclusion

We too live in a situation of terrorism, corruption, communal violence taking the center stage. We feel raged and helpless. But, we are asked not to lose heart, but to trust in God who has his own scale of time to bring about a reversal. We are asked not bow to the diktat of the prevailing opinions and customs, but resist it. We have to look from a right perspective and in terms of God's values. This compels us to see the interconnectedness of Cross and Resurrection.<sup>57</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, "The converse is also true. The sufferer is not truly comforted, his tears are not completely wiped away, until he and the powerless of this world are no longer threatened by murderous violence; comfort is not brought to completion until even past sufferings never previously understood are lifted up into the light of God and given meaning of reconciliation by his goodness."<sup>58</sup> Let me conclude with the words of Nietzsche (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*),

...until the wise have once more become joyous in their folly,  
And the poor happy over their riches.<sup>59</sup>

Tejas Vidyapeetha,  
I. E. II Phase,  
Kumbalgodu P. O.,  
Bangalore 74.

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57 *Ibid*, 72.

58 *Ibid*, 88.

59 F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, New Delhi, Heritage Publishers, 2007, 3.

# **How Happy are the Meek, for They Shall Inherit the Earth (Mt 5:5)**

**Max Gonsalves**

One can understand the inheritance of the land by the meek in terms of a gradual, mysterious, and unassuming way so that a transformation of the world is brought about by them. But, it is God, not the meek, who will overthrow the elite so that all may use the earth (Ps 37:10-11). The present inequitable access to land, based on exploitative societal relationships will end, for the earth and its resources belong to God. However, the fact of God's dominion, which has existed in the hidden depths since the beginning of the world, is capturing human hearts only little by little, mysteriously, not abruptly or forcefully. It will free the world from discord, isolation, and bondage and make it habitable for trust, harmony, and peace.

## **Introduction**

The assurance of Jesus that a personal disposition of being meek will guarantee possession of the earth is rather astounding. Meekness may be the most underrated value in the catalogue of today's virtues. It is not well enough understood to be appreciated. One is not surprised that Jesus usurps the actual laws of nature with the 'absurd' notion that the meek will inherit the earth, when nature has determined that it is usually the strongest, the swiftest, and the fittest who will survive. Commenting on this beatitude, F. D. Bruner remarks,

both the new socialist man and the new and old capitalist entrepreneur agree that it is the aggressive, not the meek, who inherit the earth. In both cases, it is those who fight for their

rights, not those who waive them, who get them. It is those who push, who struggle, who get their piece of land. For no one possesses this earth here below by gentleness, but only by pride.<sup>1</sup>

We begin with a brief study of the word 'meek'. The allusion of the third beatitude to Ps 37:11 indicates that the significance of the former is drawn from the milieu of Jewish piety that has its roots in the prophetic literature and developed in post-exilic Jewish wisdom. It referred to the meek re-inheriting the promised land of Canaan that was lost to the Babylonians, the secure possession of which was the evidence and manifestation of God's favour resting on them, and the ideal of all true and abiding blessedness. The fact that Matthew uses *praus* (meek) elsewhere twice, both of which are in reference to Jesus, could throw light on the understanding of the beatitude. In calling himself meek, Jesus invites the oppressed people to come to him for rest (11:29). In the event of his solemn entry into Jerusalem (21:5) Jesus is said to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9) who sees the Messiah as a meek king entering Zion triumphantly.

### 1. Who are the Meek?

On investigating the use of *praeis* and its Hebrew equivalent *anav* we realise that it generates a semantic open-endedness because of which the understanding of the beatitude is made extraordinarily difficult.<sup>2</sup> The term has come to be used in the Bible in two broad senses – one, in the sense of a personal virtue as found in secular Greek and in the Wisdom literature of the Bible, and second, in a sense of a deprived social situation of a people, that seems to be the predominant meaning of *praus* in the OT.

#### a) As a Personal Virtue

'*Praus*' (meek) is an important characteristic of leaders and the wise. Rather than being passively submissive, the meek are those who have an active attitude and deliberately accept to be gentle and

1 F. D. Bruner, *Matthew*, 2 Vols., Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1987, 1. 140.

2 U. Luz, *Matthew 1 – 7*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1989, 1. 236.



friendly. They are not embittered or angry at what is unpleasant. *Prautçs* (meekness) among the Greeks was a gentle friendliness that was highly prized and extolled and was a mark of a good ruler, the high-minded, noble and wise, who remained calm even in face of abuse.<sup>3</sup> Meekness in the Greek milieu looks to humankind, unlike the word in the Hebrew which looks to God. "Centuries before Jesus spoke about meekness, the Greek philosopher Aristotle had identified meekness as the virtue that was a 'golden mean' between the opposing vices of hate and apathy. The meek person does feel anger but it is under control.... It is grounded in strength. It is an active meekness, not the passive one, like fear or indifference that sometimes masquerades as meekness. Only the strong can afford to be meek."<sup>4</sup>

In the post-exilic period the term came to be associated with individuals especially the rulers. Moses is designated as meek leader (Sir 45:4). In Num 12:3, which is said to be a later insertion, the occasion for the author calling Moses meek was a conflict situation where Aaron and Miriam virtually challenge the authority of Moses as a recipient of divine revelation. The occasion was his marriage to a Cushite woman. "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (v.2). Yhwh comes in defence of Moses that he is indeed his *unique* servant for, as Yhwh declares, "he is entrusted with all my house" (v.7). 'House' would designate all that belongs to Yhwh, as also his saving plan for Israel. Because he is meek, Moses is entrusted with the task of realising Yhwh's plan for Israel by his mediatory role. The text resounds with the silence of Moses who does not react to the hostile stance of his siblings. That is left to God to deal with the matter, which is exactly what meekness is all about. We must note that this particular feature of the intimate and unique confidence Moses enjoyed with God so as to be his authentic revealer is what is also true of Jesus because of his filial relationship with God.

Meekness becomes a feature of the eschatological messianic ruler as depicted in Zech 9:9. In fact Zech 9-14 envisages a humble and

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3 F. Hauck and S. Schulz, "art. *Praus, Prautçs*," in *TDNT*, 6. 645-651, 646.

4 "The Merry Meek, (Mt 5:5)" - author anonymous (download from net).

suffering ruler who will bring redemption to Israel (cf. 11:7; 12:10). Matthew sees Jesus as a fulfilment of the vision of the prophet.

*b) The 'Meek' as a Socially Deprived People who Trust in God*

The second broad sense of 'meek' indicates the *praeis* as a destitute social and economic state of the person, inferred by the fact that *praus* in the LXX translates the Hebrew *anav* (nine times), and *ani* (thrice), which more frequently is translated as *ptôchos* or 'poor'.<sup>5</sup> The verb root of *anav* (*anah*) means "to find oneself in a stunted, humble, lowly position." Hence, *praus* "is never predicated of God in the OT, as distinct from the profane Greek." *Anav* has a social connotation of one who is in subjection. Economically, he is one who has no property and who has to earn his bread by serving others. It seems to denote a powerless and deprived social and economic situation of a group of people – a condition that renders them a social non-entity and victimized.

However, the term predominantly takes on a religious sense of "one who feels that he is a servant in relation to God and who subjects himself to Him quietly and without resistance."<sup>6</sup> He calmly accepts both fate and human injustice. It is their beleaguered situation which leads them to turn to God in trust and wait patiently for his help. In the twelve instances *praus* (as translating *ani*) is used in the OT, it refers to God's favour shown to the meek in terms of deliverance (Ps 76:9; Job 36:15), vindication (Ps 147:6; 149:4; Sir 10:14), and guidance (Ps 25:9). The meek are the ones who are preferred and favoured by God over the mighty, the wicked and the renowned, and they will be ultimately the bearers of God's promise of salvation.

It is this sense of 'meek', which we find in Ps. 37:11 ("but the meek shall possess the land and delight themselves in abundant prosperity"), that is quoted in Mt 5:5. The psalm essentially gives a wisdom teaching. The teacher seeks to convey an assurance to someone who is outraged at the successful lives of the wicked.<sup>7</sup> When

5 *Ptôchos* in the LXX translates *anav* 4 times, and *ani* 39 times.

6 F. Hauck and S. Schulz, "art. *Praus, Prautçs*," in *TDNT*, 6. 647.

7 H.-W. Jungling, "Psalms 1-41," in W.R. Farmer (ed), *The International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1998, 817.

we examine the entire forty verses of Ps 37, we get a clear portrait of the 'meek' (*anawim*). Besides v. 11, the lot of the righteous (used here synonymously with meek) who 'will possess the land' occurs four times elsewhere in the psalm (vv. 9, 22, 29, and 34).<sup>8</sup> Correspondingly, five times the wicked are threatened with being rooted out. The psalm is exhorting the righteous to have an attitude of trust and hope in Yhwh that he will guarantee their eventual vindication in contrast to the wicked whose prosperity is short-lived and will be destroyed. The righteous are to commit their way to the Lord (v. 5) and are to be quiet or still and wait patiently for his intervention (v. 7) and not be jealous about those who succeed. The omnipotent God has their affairs under his control and will work things out for the best. The disposition that ensures the meek of possessing the land is one of generosity, of refraining from anger, and doing good especially seeking justice. The basic meaning that the phrase evokes is that the people who are being victimized in some way or other, and who still put their trust in God's plan, are promised a secure future. As Crosby well puts it:

If meekness means total dedication to God's plan, the meek person reflects a whole reversal of attitudes toward power, possessions, and prestige. In taking the yoke of God's plan for the world, meekness reflects a non-violent way of dealing with wealth in all its forms.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. 'Meekness' in the Matthean Text

In the NT the word *praus* is found just four times, three of which are in Mt.<sup>10</sup> The noun form *prautēs*, however, is found eleven times, mostly in the Pauline letters. On investigating these texts, one can see that meekness comes to have a specifically Christian meaning consequent upon one's belief in Jesus Christ. Matthew is the only one among the evangelists who depicts Jesus as meek. This

8 *Ibid.*, 816. The psalm is acrostic. The five verses are chiastically distributed throughout the section in the pattern 2:1:2.

9 M. Crosby, *Spirituality of the Beatitudes, Matthew's Challenge for First World Christians*, Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1981, 115.

10 Mt 5:5; 11:29; 21:5; 1 Pt 3:4.

Christological aspect of meekness has also to be considered as related to the third beatitude.

**a) *Jesus the Meek in Mt 11:25-30***

Jesus declares that his unique and intimate relationship with God lies in him knowing the Father and vice versa (11:27). Jesus then goes on to invite those who labour and are heavy laden to take his yoke so as to learn from him and find respite because he is meek (*praus*) and humble of heart (11:29). Matthew presents Jesus as a model of meekness and humility to the disciples. The latter are those who suffer oppression, but when they embrace the yoke of Jesus they will experience true rest. The use of a Wisdom motif in Mt 11:29 is possible because there is here an allusion to Sir. 51:26. As God is Father, Wisdom is a mother who calls her sons to a difficult path of life of discipline. In Sirach, the Mosaic Law comes to be identified with Wisdom personified (Sir 24). To submit oneself to the yoke of the Law of Moses is to gain wisdom. Wisdom's yoke does not hamper the wise but gives him a sure sense of direction in life.<sup>11</sup> Thus Jesus speaks with the authority of Wisdom. James speaks about the 'meekness of wisdom', holding meekness to be virtually synonymous with wisdom (Jas 3:13, 17).

Jesus thanks the Father for having revealed to babes 'these things' – a reference to the good news of the kingdom of God ushering its presence in the person of Jesus. The preceding context (Mt 11:1ff) begins with the query of John the Baptiser and his disciples about the significance of Jesus' deeds. The inquiry gives Jesus an occasion to bring out the underlying conflict situation of the religious leaders' hostile response to John and to him. The discourse ends with Jesus claiming to be not only Wisdom personified (11:2, 19) but also the Christ. His deeds justify the claims about himself and his teachings. It is only the meek who can discover who Jesus really is. This revelation is hidden from the ones who claim to be wise and knowledgeable (11:25). Jesus has intimate knowledge of God because he is the divine Son. Paradoxically, his meekness gives him the

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11 F. Manns, "Blessed Are the Meek for They Shall Inherit the Earth," *SBFLA* 50 (2000) 37-51, 42.



authority to empower the powerless, those who are left out. The people who suffered from the burden of laws and precepts that the Rabbis of Israel imposed upon them (23:4), are now invited by Jesus to take upon themselves the yoke of *his* teachings. Thus the meek are those who put themselves in the right disposition for obtaining the knowledge of God that Jesus shares with them. Further, Jesus expresses his solidarity with those who are faithful to him.

***b) Jesus as the Meek King (Mt 21:1-11)***

Here see how Matthew quotes Zech 9:9 – “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble (meek - *praus*) and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass” (Mt 21:5) - in his interpretation of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The messianic king comes to take possession of the city. It “signifies that Jesus, the already present and at the same time expected king of the end time, has in his person realized meekness and humility and in this respect is a model for the community.”<sup>12</sup> The king seated on an ass is an allusion to an ancient custom also present in the anointing of Solomon (1 Kings 1:33, 38). It was a way in which kings expressed their humility before the people. By his humility the king pointed to the eschatological salvation that his people waited for. However, here, Mt makes a critique of the monarchy of Israel, which had brought death and ruin to the nation. Matthew’s omission of the phrase – ‘triumphant and victorious’ from the text of Zechariah was probably to highlight the arrival of the king marked by a spirit of humility and austerity that were not common among the ancient kings or even among the religious leaders of the time. The messianic perspective flows throughout the text. Those who hear it long for the promised peace; they hope for the justice this king is going to bring. It gives hope in a time when there is no real possibility of reinstating the Davidic monarchy and when the former euphoria of the return and the reconstruction of the Temple are already far from memory.<sup>13</sup> The vision of the Messiah that Zechariah gives is one of meekness and suffering, and of the vindication of the meek.

12 G. Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1988, 36.

13 P. R. Andinach, “Zechariah,” in W.R. Farmer (ed), *The International Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1998, 1195.

...On the day of Yhwh when all are assembled, God alone will be the one who saves and rescues the faithful ones. The injustice and oppression to which they have been subjected is not the last word of God for God's own people, nor for humanity. In unified and comprehensible language Zechariah invites us to trust that justice will have its final victory.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the third beatitude is to be understood along similar lines with the two Christological texts about the meek messiah. The meek Jesus is the rightful heir who enters Zion to take possession of the city. The Risen Jesus is present to his community of believers as Lord, and has ushered in the presence of God's kingdom not through force and violence but by his meekness which is humility manifested in kindness. It is because Jesus was meek that he had unique access to the knowledge of God. He thanks God because God enables only the meek to have access to the knowledge of who Jesus is. Thus the disposition of meekness guarantees a person to inherit and come into the realm of the kingdom of God

### 3. '... They Shall Inherit the Land'

The Hebrew verb *yârað* has a wide range of meaning besides just 'inheriting'. It also means 'occupy' (by driving out previous tenants, and possessing it in their place) in the sense of displacing the ownership. The land as inheritance to be taken possession of is well known in Deuteronomy. The Deuteronomist evolves a theology around the great historical event of the Israelites taking possession of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Land is the gift of God that guarantees life for the nation when his laws are obeyed. Israel's infidelity would lead to the death of the nation by which they would be dispossessed of their land and banished into exile. Hence the inheriting of land has from the beginning a religious significance.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to note that inheriting connotes more God's giving than man's acquisition. Further, man has no absolute right to the land. The individual right must be subordinated to the rights of everyone in

14 *Ibid.*, 1190.

15 N. Lohfink, "art. *yârað*," in *TDOT*, 6. 368-396, 381-382.

the community.<sup>16</sup> This idea is amply reflected in Deuteronomy, where the author constantly admonished Israel not to forget that land and its resources are God given.

Centuries of subjugation even after the restoration and of being ruled by foreign nations amounted to a state of dispossession of land. Under the strain of foreign occupation, the 'inheriting of land' became eschatological, a reality much desired in the future with the coming of the Messiah. The wicked would be evicted from the land they occupied in arrogance, and the righteous would come to possess it. The possession of the land as an eschatological hope is quite prominent and signifies many nuances of meaning in the literature of the Inter-Testamental period. The eschatological meaning is strengthened, for example, in the Peshier on Ps 37 (4QpPs37) of Qumran.<sup>17</sup> The land came to be understood as a 'transformation of it in the days of the Messiah' in the apocalyptic texts such as 1 Enoch 45:3-5, so that the promise of inheritance of the land is extended to all the earth and it concerned eternal life.<sup>18</sup> It was also used metaphorically of heaven in the Testament of Job 33. Once again, in rabbinic literature too, there are several interpretations of Ps. 37 as regards 'land possession' but, in general, it takes an eschatological slant<sup>19</sup> by looking at the land as a symbol of future life. But there are also texts that insist on the spiritualization of the cult by attaching a special privilege to those who live in Israel.<sup>20</sup>

However, in the light of the immediate background of the Gospels and our text (Mt 5:5), the meaning of 'possessing the land' is not to be taken literally but symbolically, as Lagrange long ago commented: "Le psalmiste 37:11 disait *hoi de praeis klçronomçsousin* ...en

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16 M. Crosby, *Spirituality of the Beatitudes, Matthew's Challenge for First World Christians*, 106.

17 F. Manns, "Blessed Are the Meek for They Shall Inherit the Earth," 45.

18 *Ibid.*, 46.

19 *Sifre Bamidbar* Nu 6, 26, 42, 'the meek shall inherit the land and shall rejoice in great peace.'

20 F. Manns, "Blessed Are the Meek for They Shall Inherit the Earth," 48-49.

parlant de la terre d'Israel, mais dans l'ordre du discours de Jesus, la terre n'est plus qu'un symbole. Tout est transposé."<sup>21</sup>

The prefix *makarioi* of the beatitudes indicates that the beatitudes belong to the wisdom literary genre.<sup>22</sup> Ps 37 is also put in a wisdom context. We notice here that while Mt 5:5 has the definite article – inherit *the* land, the article is not found in Ps 37 with regard to possessing the land. F. Manns explains the difference:

The article *ἡ γῆ* in the wisdom and messianic context cannot be determinative one, but must have a generic meaning as it often has. To inherit the land means to inherit the Kingdom. The parallelism with the two first Beatitudes permits the conclusion.<sup>23</sup>

In light of the Inter-Testamental meaning and the future eschatology found in Mt,

we read *praeis* who on the basis of their oppressed situation acknowledge not their own will but the great and gracious will of God. To them Jesus brings inheritance of the coming aeon, which includes (cf. Mt. 19:29) secure dwelling in their own land... those who are now oppressed and bowed down will be rulers of the world in the eschaton.<sup>24</sup>

However, others like Strecker, hold that "Matthew has spiritualized the traditional view. The promised legacy of the land is the participation in the coming kingdom of God, which is invisible and not at one's disposal and yet present in Jesus Christ."<sup>25</sup> The realm of the Kingdom is cosmic, but that does not mean something beyond, for the promise of the earth makes clear that the kingdom of heaven also comprises

21 M.J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Matthieu*, Paris, Librairie Lecoffre, 1948, 83.

22 In the LXX *makarios* translates the Hebrew *'ašrê* which is found abundantly in the Psalms (25 times) and Wisdom Literature: 11 times in Ben Sirach, 5 times in Proverbs, etc. and also in the pseudoepigrapha.

23 F. Manns, "Blessed Are the Meek for They Shall Inherit the Earth," 50.

24 F. Hauck and S. Schulz, ""art. *Praus, Prautcs*," in *TDNT*, 6.648.

25 G. Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 36.



a new 'this world'. Jesus has vividly described the nature of the Kingdom especially through several parables. One can understand the inheritance of the land by the meek in terms of a gradual, mysterious, and unassuming way a transformation of the world is brought about by them. But, it is "God, not the meek," who "will overthrow the elite so that all may use the earth (Ps 37:10-11). The present inequitable access to land, based on exploitative societal relationships, will end" for "the earth and its resources belong to God".<sup>26</sup> Lapide expresses the point succinctly:

It is a question of building a realm of heaven here on this earth. It is rather the emergence of God's royal dominion over all creation - a dominion that of course has existed in the hidden depths since the beginning of the world, but is capturing human hearts only little by little, mysteriously, not abruptly or forcefully. It will free the world from discord, isolation, and bondage, make it habitable for trust, harmony, and peace.<sup>27</sup>

The inheritance of land was understood idiomatically among the early Christians, and the evangelist shares this view. The New Testament, in the end, almost invariably speaks of inheriting eternal life or the kingdom of God.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

Our understanding of the beatitude of the meek possessing the land is that God will hand over the world to them as a legacy, just as he gave Israel the land of Canaan as an inheritance. By the time of the Christian era, the phrase 'possessing the land' had become a cliché to mean basically a sense of security that the meek will come to possess. For Matthew it is the realm of the kingdom of heaven becoming a reality on earth. It is Jesus who by his role as a meek messiah, who having submitted himself to God's plan, realises the

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26 W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins. A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, Bangalore, TPI, 2007, 133.

27 P. Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount, Utopia or Program for Action?* Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1986, 28.

28 Cf. Mt 19:29; 25:35; Mk 10:17; Lk 10:25; 1 Cor 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal 5:21 etc.

long-cherished hope of Israel, viz. the Immanuel – that God would dwell in their midst (Mt 1:18-23; 28:20). Meekness, such as Jesus exemplified, demands total dedication to God's plan for the world. The community of believers embody the presence of Christ and thus possess everything. Paul has expressed this experience to the Corinthians making them realise that by their faith in Christ, everything belonged to them (1Cor 3:21-2). Thus the Christian experience of meekness is basically one that gives enrichment to life, an optimum feeling of contentment as though one needs nothing more to satisfy his being.

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# **To Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness (Mt 5: 6)**

**Stanislas S.**

The author believes that the beatitudes delineate appropriate behaviour for both personal and social life. Righteousness means both personal uprightness and practice of social justice. For the right human conduct, understood as doing the will of God, concerns all areas of human life. The Indian religious term *dharma* seems to reflect in a better way this comprehensive idea of righteousness in Matthew.

## **Introduction**

In the consumerist society in which we live, our wants and desires are many and recurring. Any amount of consumption of goods does not bring the desired satisfaction but on the contrary, leaves the person in frustration and despair. The Beatitude in Mt 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” gives us the right orientation. Understanding this beatitude poses a number of questions such as these: ‘Are we to interpret the expression “hunger and thirst” in a material sense?’ ‘How to understand the key word *dikaïosunē*, righteousness?’ ‘Is it God’s gift or human activity?’ ‘Is it a religious endeavour or social justice?’ ‘Are the Matthean beatitudes eschatological blessings or ethical commands?’ etc. This article is a modest attempt to arrive at pertinent responses to these questions by giving due importance to both exegesis and hermeneutics in the Indian context.

## **1. The Matthean and the Lukan Versions of the Beatitude**

The fourth beatitude (Mt 5:6) is one of the four beatitudes that

Matthew probably inherited from the common tradition (5:3, 4, 6 and 11-12 // Lk 6:20-26) the Q source<sup>1</sup> and 6b is probably an addition by Matthew himself.<sup>2</sup> In Luke, only the *peinôntes*, “hungry” are mentioned while Matthew adds the *dipsôntes*, “thirsty” and the *dikaïosunē*, “righteousness” in the accusative. Whereas Luke gives the second person plural passive form of the verb *chortazô* “satisfy” (*chortasthēsethe*), Matthew gives the third person plural form *chortasthēsontai*. The first strophe expresses the quality of hungering and thirsting for righteousness, while the second utters a blessing or a promise of reward in the future.

### a) *The Meaning and Translation of Makarioi*

In the Greek world, *makarios* is a subsidiary form of *makar* used first of the gods to denote “the transcendent happiness of a life beyond care, labour and death” that they enjoyed (Homer, *Odyssey* 5:7) and then, of the dead who have attained supraterrrestrial life of the gods. From Aristotle, it has been used of the wealthy that are above the normal cares and worries of the common mass.<sup>3</sup> The LXX translates *’ašrê*, used only of human beings, by *makarios* restricting the use of the word *bârûk* to God alone.<sup>4</sup> While in the Greek thought, gods enjoyed happiness of life, in the OT God is the giver of all blessedness, the fullness of life manifest in the abundance of earthly blessings (Sir 25:8; Gen 30:13; Song 6:9; Job 29:10, 11; Sir 14:20 etc.) and God’s will is the basis of Israel’s blessedness (Mal 3:12; Bar 4: 4). *Makarios*, however, takes on the eschatological significance too (Ps 71:17; Is 31:9; 4 Mac 17:18; 18:19).<sup>5</sup> In the NT, *makarios* takes a significant turn of meaning referring to the religious joy resulting from the

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- 1 R. A. Guelich, “The Matthean Beatitudes : ‘Entrance- Requirements’ or Eschatological Blessings ? ,” *JBL* 95 (1976) 415-434, 432, 420, 429.
  - 2 Cf. N. J. McEleney, “The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount/Plain,” *CBQ* 43 (1981) 1-13, 5, 7, 13; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 Vols., ICC, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1988, 1. 434; U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007, 1.185.
  - 3 F. Hauck, “art. *Makarios*,” in *TDNT*, 4.362-364, 367- 370.
  - 4 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1. 431-432.
  - 5 G. Betram, “art. *Makarios*,” in *TDNT*, 4. 364-367, 366.



salvation of the Kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup> Though *makarios* implies also the sense of 'blessed', 'fortunate' 'congratulations to', it may best be translated by the word 'happy.'<sup>7</sup>

### b) *Hunger and Thirst*

While the Lukan beatitude (Lk 6:21) declares 'happy' those who have physical hunger,<sup>8</sup> the Matthean beatitude concerns "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Starting from Maldonat, a few authors have understood this Matthean expression in a material sense, as if it refers to people who have "starved for justice" or people who are victims of injustice.<sup>9</sup> The expression, however, has been used in a metaphorical sense in the OT and the other Judaic literature to express the desire for the word of God (Amos 8:11-12),<sup>10</sup> for the eschatological bliss (Is 49:9-10 [cf. Rev 7:16-17; Ps 107:4-9]; 48: 21; 44:3-4; 41:17-18; 43:20; 35:1, 6, 7; 65:13; Jer 38:25 [LXX]), for seeing God and participating in worship (Ps 24:3-4; 42:2-3; 63:2-3; 84:2-3) and for the knowledge and practice of God's precepts (Sir 24:19-22; 51:23-30; Prov 9:5-6; cf. Is 55:1-3; 1QH 4: 10-12).<sup>11</sup> Philo speaks of thirst for moral beauty, knowledge, wisdom, instruction, virtue, good etc (*Fug.*, 139; *Virt.*, 79; *Somn.* I, 50; *Post.*, 136 etc.).<sup>12</sup>

U. Luz interprets 'hunger and thirst' in an active sense (cf. 3:15; 5:10), as 'to long for' (Amos 8:11; Jer 38:25 [LXX]; 1 Bar 2: 18; etc.)

6 F. Hauck, "art. *Makarios*," in *TDNT*, 4.368.

7 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2007, 161.

8 L. Goppelt, "art. *Peinaô*," in *TDNT*, 6.12-22, 18. The saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* too has the same significance as in Lk, cf. J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*, New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1990, 134.

9 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3 Vols., Paris, J. Gabalda et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1973, 3.366-367; M. A. Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," *CBQ* 58 (1996) 460-479, 467-470.

10 H. Balz, "art. *Peinaô*," in *EDNT*, 3. 64; J. Behm, "art. *Dipsaô*," in *TDNT*, 2.226-227.

11 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3.373-735; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1.452.

12 F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (trans.), *Philo*, 10 Vols., Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1929-1962, 2. 407; 5. 85, 321, 323; 8. 211.

and 'to exert oneself for' (Sir 24:21-22).<sup>13</sup> The hunger for righteousness is then, "blessedness of moral integrity, the desire for spiritual goods"<sup>14</sup>, and "energetic longing and a decisive effort toward the realization of righteousness"<sup>15</sup>. More than a simple concern or striving for uprightness, "it is", as Goppelt says, "the desire, fed by painful lack, that God's will should be done."<sup>16</sup>

### c) *The Meaning of Dikaïosunē in Mt 5: 6*

In Greek thought *dikaïosunē* representing the second stage word construction of *dikē* – *dikaïos*, has legal, ethical and religious connotations. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it was used as a general term for virtue, particularly, for the civil virtue of observance of law and fulfillment of duty (Plato, *Phaedo*, 82a). In mysticism, it was considered as *dunamis*, a power of virtue.<sup>17</sup>

The Hebrew root *ts-d-q* in all its forms, *tsedeq*, *tsedaqah* and *tsadiq*, occurs 476 times, and the LXX translates them by *dikaïos* and its cognates 452 times.<sup>18</sup> These Hebrew and Greek words are relational in nature.<sup>19</sup> "A man is righteous when he meets certain claims which another has on him in virtue of relationship. Even the righteousness of God is primarily his covenantal rule in fellowship with his people."<sup>20</sup>

13 U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 1. 195-196.

14 C. Spicq, "art. *Dikaïos*," in *TLNT*, 1. 318-347, 332.

15 P. Melchior, "The Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness," *The Divine Shepherd's Voice* 1 (2003) 100-111.

16 L. Goppelt, "art. *Peinadō*," in *TDNT*, 6.18.

17 G. Schrenk, "art. *Dikaïosunē*," in *TDNT*, 2. 192-210, 192-193; C. Spicq, "art. *Dikaïos*," in *TLNT*, 1. 326-327.

18 R. G. Bratcher, "'Righteousness' in Matthew," *The Bible Translator* 40 (1989) 228-235, 228-230.

19 J. W. Olley, "'Righteousness'- Some Issues in Old Testament Translation into English," *The Bible Translator* 38 (1987) 307-315, 309; G. Quell and G. Schrenk, *Righteousness*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1951; J. N. Schofield, "'Righteousness' in the Old Testament," *The Bible Translator* 16 (1965) 112-116, 113.

20 W. Eichrodt's view as represented by G. Schrenk, "art. *Dikaïosunē*," in *TDNT*, 2. 195.

This concept of relationship includes both the forensic element and the idea of saving action (Is 43: 9, 26; 50: 8f.). Thus the *tsedeq/tsedaqah* of God would refer to his saving act and the covenantal fidelity (Ex 9: 27; Dt 32:4; 1 Sam 12:7; Ps 71:16; Is 41:2, 10; 42:6; 45:8; 51:5; Jer 23:6; 50:7;). Mercy, truth, faithfulness and salvation are closely linked to it (Dt 32:4; Is 43:6; 50:8; 20: 22; Pss 87:11f.; 102:11, 17 [LXX]), and in the LXX *dikaio sunç* is often linked with judgment, *krisis* and *krima* (Heb. *Mishpath*: Ps 93:15; Ez 45:9; Is 61:8; Mal 2:17) and truth (Tob 14:7; Wis 5:6). This pictures God as the righteous judge (Ps 9:5; 34:24; 95:13).<sup>21</sup> In his study on the usage of the *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* in Is 56-66, J. W. Olley observes that *dikaio sunç* "is not an abstract moral virtue or principle, nor is one to think of 'order' in a static sense or as not involving struggle. One therefore speaks of 'being right, putting right, ensuring order, bringing about harmony and what is right.'"<sup>22</sup>

When applied to man, *dikaio sunç* means the observance of the will of God (Is 5:7).<sup>23</sup> In the synagogue, *tsedaqah* means righteous human action. In the rabbinic usage, it was used particularly of almsgiving as the most important way of fulfilling the law (Cf. Prov 10:2; Tob 12:9; 14:11; cf. Mt 6:2). "Fulfillment of the Law" thus became the basis of the rabbinic view of righteousness.<sup>24</sup> Josephus uses it to mean man's right conduct (*Antiquities*, 9:182). For him *dikaio sunç* is the first integral part of *eusebeia*.<sup>25</sup>

In the NT, *dikaio sunç* occurs 91 times, out of which 57 are found in the Pauline literature in the sense of justification by God. It occurs five times in the Pastorals, six times in Hebrews, thrice respectively

21 G. Schrenk, "art. *Dikaio sunç*," in *TDNT*, 2. 195-196. Philo has only one use with reference to the righteousness of God (*Legum Allegoriae*, III. 77), and Josephus uses it for God in the sense of judicial retribution (*Antiquities*, 11. 268).

22 J. W. Olley, "Righteousness" 308-309; for a similar meaning in the Psalms, see R. G. Bratcher, "'Righteousness' in Matthew," 228-229.

23 G. Schrenk, "art. *Dikaio sunç*," in *TDNT*, 2.196.

24 *Ibid.*, 196-197.

25 *Ibid.*, 193-194.

in James and in 1 Jn. In Matthew it occurs 7 times and the adjective *dikaïos* 17 times. As in the OT, it brings out the sense of God as the judge and the Redeemer of his people (cf. Acts 17:31; 2 Pet 1:1; Heb 11:33; Rev 19:11). Nonetheless, "*Dikaïosunç*", observes Schrenk, "is almost always used in the NT for the right conduct of man which follows the will of God and is pleasing to him, for rectitude of life before God, for uprightness before his judgment."<sup>26</sup>

### *i) Dikaïosunç in the gospel of Matthew*

The term *dikaïosunç* occurring in the fourth and eighth beatitudes (5:6 and 10), serves to link the beatitudes to the whole Sermon on the Mount (5:20, 6:1, 33) and the Gospel (3:15 and 21:32).<sup>27</sup> Matthew has used it with a nuance befitting the 'ethics of the new covenant which directs the disciples to conform to God's plan.

For Matthew, righteousness is the right conduct of man in conformity to the divine will by means of observing the prescriptions of God as interpreted by Jesus in the SM.<sup>28</sup> 'Fulfilling the righteousness' in the context of Jesus' Baptism (3:15) and the coming of John the Baptist in the 'way of righteousness' (21:32) mean conformity to the divine will.<sup>29</sup> The two references in the SM (5:20; 6:1) with the pronoun 'your' only suggest the righteousness demanded of the disciples (cf. 2Cor 9:8-10).<sup>30</sup> Doing the will of the Father (7:21) is doing justice, which in fact, is the precondition for entering into the reign of God (5:20; 6:33; 21:31; 12:49; Mk 3:34; Mt 19:17). More precisely, doing righteousness implies putting the words of Jesus into practice (7:24, 26).<sup>31</sup> As R. T. France puts it, *dikaïosunç* in Matthew can hardly mean divine action of establishing justice in the

26 *Ibid.*, 198; K. Kertelge, "art. *Dikaïosunç*," in *EDNT*, 1.325-330, 326.

27 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 209.

28 S. Savarimuthu, *A Community in Search of its Identity*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2007, 220, 248.

29 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 219, 239, 244.

30 G. Miegge quoted by J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 246.

31 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 253, 256-257, 289-290, 351- 352.



world, but refers rather to right conduct and to living the way God wants of his people.<sup>32</sup>

*ii) Is Dikaïosunē in 5:6 God's gift or human activity?*

This question is closely linked to the other question, 'Are the beatitudes eschatological blessings or ethical commands?' Hence both are discussed together here. Though the term *dikaïosunē* in Matthew refers to human conduct, in 5:6 it is understood differently. Dupont studies elaborately three different types of interpretations put forward by authors: a) The righteousness to be established by God at the coming of his Kingdom in the eschatological times; b) Righteousness as a gift or grace of God; and c) A human conduct of doing the will of God.<sup>33</sup> U. Luz sees the Beatitudes as a) Words of grace; b) Ethical exhortations; and c) Regulations for the life of the community.<sup>34</sup>

These proposals may be narrowed down to two significant ways of interpretations: a) Righteousness understood as God's gift, in fact, represents the Jewish understanding of the term, according to which righteousness is given to Israel and to humanity as a constitutive principle of creation and the Torah, and interpreted rightly, it is the means by which hunger and thirst for righteousness can be met.<sup>35</sup> b) Righteousness, in the sense of ethical command, is centred on human efforts. A. Descamps understands the justice for which people are hungry and thirsty and for which people suffer persecution as the justice of human beings, a religious attitude in the present time and not the justice of God whose eschatological manifestation we wait for. He proposes to translate the beatitude as, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for a perfect Christian life.'<sup>36</sup> Justice, for A.

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32 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 2007, 167; Przybylski also favours this view, see here W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1. 452.

33 For a detailed discussion, see J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 355-365.

34 U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 1. 188-189, 190.

35 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, 131.

36 A. Descamps, *Les Justes et la Justice dans les Evangiles et le Christianisme primitif*, Louvain, Publications Universitaires de Louvain/Gembloux : Editions

Loisy, is not the justice based on fulfilling the legal obligations but the justice pronounced by Jesus in the SM. This is rightly the evangelical justice that Jesus demands of his followers (5:20).<sup>37</sup> For Dupont, while the Lukan beatitudes are eschatological, those of Matthew are ethical, serving as entrance requirements.<sup>38</sup> Though he sees Is 61:1-3 at the backdrop of the Matthean beatitudes,<sup>39</sup> he prefers to read this beatitude in the light of the Wisdom language and the words of Philo, *tous dipsôntes kai peînôntes kalokagathias* "those who hunger and thirst after nobility of character" (*Fug.*, 139).<sup>40</sup>

For Luz, the *Sitz im Leben* of Matthean beatitudes is *paraenesis* as Matthew's addition and interpretation appear to have moved the sense of Beatitudes in that direction. In the context of the Kingdom, the promised glorious future is already in Jesus' activity, and therefore, the beatitudes are not empty promises but "a language act that makes the coming Kingdom of God a present event."<sup>41</sup> R. G. Bratcher opts to translate Mt 5: 6 as follows: "Happy are all those whose greatest desire is that God's will should be done." For him, "Righteousness is the way God's rule on earth is exercised," and "the **righteousness** that belongs to the citizens of the Kingdom is of the same kind as God's **righteousness**, which means a way of life that reflects the divine **righteousness**."<sup>42</sup> This righteousness, which is the cause of

J. Dukulot, S.A., 1950, 172-173 ; G. Strecker, "Die Makarismen der Bergpredigt," *NTS* 17 (1971) 264-266.

37 A. Loisy, *Les Evangiles Synoptiques*, 2 Vols., Ceffonds, Près Montier-En-Der (Haute Marne), 1907, 1. 548-549.

38 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 1. 254-258; F. Hauck, "art. *Makarios*," in *TDNT*, 4. 368.

39 *Ibid.*, 2. 98.

40 *Ibid.*, 3. 361.

41 U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 1.187-189; R. T. France, *Matthew*, 167. Dibelius calls the beatitudes "the catalogue of Christian virtues"; for Windisch, "they are conditions for entering the Kingdom of God" and W. Trilling suggests that "Be perfect" (5:48) may be the heading for the whole section, see U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 1. 188.

42 R. G. Bratcher, "'Righteousness' in Matthew," 234 - 235.

suffering and persecution (5:10), cannot be understood as the action of God.<sup>43</sup>

There are authors, however, who consider the beatitudes as eschatological blessings and the righteousness in 5: 6 as the gift of God. Their main argument is that Is 61:1-3 has always been interpreted in an eschatological sense. R. A. Guelich, for example, thinks that the Beatitudes "are but an expression of the fulfillment of Isaiah 61....For Matthew, as for Q, the Beatitudes are the eschatological pronouncement of the presence of the New Age. He, no more than Luke, is setting forth a list of ethical requirements for the Kingdom."<sup>44</sup> For him, "One's relationship with God and the resultant conduct towards God (Mt 6:1-18) and others (5:21-48) was the product of, not the entrance-requirements for, the Kingdom."<sup>45</sup> Davies and Allison hold that the main concern of Matthew in 5:3-12 is to bless the faithful as they are now rather than give a *paraenesis*.<sup>46</sup>

The views of these authors, however, do not stand the argument. Whether the ethical orientation is from Matthew's special tradition Q<sup>Mt</sup> (cf. 5:5, 7, 8, 9)<sup>47</sup> or from Matthew himself,<sup>48</sup> the beatitudes in their present form are not only blessings but also ethical commands.<sup>49</sup> Preoccupied with the moral laxity (16:27) and the false complacency of the community (24:42-25:30),<sup>50</sup> Matthew wants to inculcate in the

43 R. T. France, *Matthew*, 167.

44 R. A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes," 433.

45 *Ibid.*, 429.

46 W.D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Saint Matthew*, I. 438-440, 433; see also C. M. Tuckett, "The Beatitudes: A Source-Critical Study," *NT* 25 (1983) 193-207, 205-206.

47 R. A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes," 423; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Saint Matthew*, I. 438-440, 433; C. M. Tuckett, "The Beatitudes," 205-206.

48 U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, I. 190.

49 N. J. McEleney, "The Beatitudes," 11; cf. E. Lipinski, "Macarismes et Psaumes de Congratulation," *RB* 75 (1968) 321-367, 363-367.

50 J. Zumstein quoted by S. Savarimuthu, *A Community*, 226.

disciples a desire to practice justice. He is not satisfied with having Christians who say 'Lord, Lord!' but wants them to become doers of the will of God (7:21; 21:31) by concretely engaging themselves in 'good works' (5:16; cf. 1 Pet 2:12; Tit 2:7-8, 14). His concern is not to say that justice is a gift of God but to instill in the Christians a desire for searching the evangelical perfection (5:48).<sup>51</sup>

The beatitudes are not just consolations promised in the future but "they see the present in the light of the future."<sup>52</sup> The present conditions should be fulfilled in view of the judgment of God (cf. 25:31-46).<sup>53</sup> As A. Descamps observes, the first member of each verse relates to the present life while the *apodosis* points to the eschatological.<sup>54</sup> Though the verbs in the second member of the beatitudes are in future tense, except those of vv. 3 and 10, the beatitudes are not referring completely to the future because the clause "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (vv. 3 and 5) points to the present time. The tension between 'now' and 'not yet' is running through the beatitudes.<sup>55</sup>

### iii) *Personal religious endeavour or social justice?*

The word *dikaiousunç* is translated in English as 'righteousness' and 'justice' or 'uprightness.' KJV, NAB and NRSV translate *dikaiousunç* (Mt 5: 6) as "righteousness," but NAB has "uprightness". While the word 'justice' seems to have legal connotations, 'righteousness' seems to have moral implications.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, 'righteous(ness)' is very often linked to the divine or moral law but 'justice' to 'social justice' and 'human rights.'<sup>57</sup> As H. D. Betz

51 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 382-384, 327.

52 F. Hauck, "art. *Makarios*," in *TDNT*, 4. 369.

53 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 319.

54 A. Descamps, *Les Justes et la Justice*, 172-173.

55 R. T. France, *Matthew*, 164.

56 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 16 Vols., Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1973, 5. 640; 8. 678.

57 J. W. Olley, "Righteousness," 307, 314.



observes, though 'righteousness' has an archaic ring and a connotation of false moralizing and self-righteousness, it is to be preferred to 'justice' because it emphasizes the ethical connotation which is important to the SM.<sup>58</sup>

Coming to the praxis side of 'righteousness', in the view of Luz, it may not be so much a desire for establishing social justice as to lead a righteous life. He admits, however, its close link to the idea of the Kingdom of God, for SM gives the content of the gospel of the Kingdom of God (4:17, 23).<sup>59</sup> This link between righteousness and the Kingdom makes it impossible to restrict its meaning to personal religious sphere alone. If the physical hunger and thirst of Luke (SP) are the result of social injustice, observes Betz, hunger and thirst for justice of Matthew (SM) aim at getting rid of that social injustice. In his view, SM does not distinguish between the goal of personal righteousness and social justice.<sup>60</sup> J. Pathrapankal's comment on the SM is pertinent: "Matthew places Jesus' teaching in an eschatological framework; nevertheless, much of his teaching concerns appropriate behaviour for both personal and social life."<sup>61</sup> Righteousness means both personal uprightness and practice of social justice. For the right human conduct, understood as doing the will of God, penetrates all the areas of human life, in relation to life partner (5:27-32), to God (5:33-37; 6:1-18; 7:7-11, 21-27), to others (5:21-26, 38-48; 7:1-5, 12; 7:15-20), to worldly riches (6:19-21, 24) and even to the creatures (6:25-34). The Indian religious term *dharma* seems to reflect in a better way this comprehensive idea of righteousness in Matthew.

The word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhr* which means "to hold or support, to nurture, to maintain, to give to have, to possess", and "to act conformably to religious ordinances, to execute the precepts

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58 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon*, 129, fn. 287.

59 U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 1. 189; W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins. A Sociopolitical and a Religious Reading*, Bangalore, TPI, 2007, 133-134 interprets Mt 5: 6 from a liberation perspective.

60 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon*, 129.

61 J. Pathrapankal, *The Christian Programme*, 27.

of the Vedas.”<sup>62</sup> In Mañu (XII: 50),<sup>63</sup> Mimamsakas, and in Buddhism<sup>64</sup> the ‘cosmic’ order’ has been brought down to the law of human behaviour and right conduct. So also, righteousness in Matthew cannot be restricted to anthropocentric or social dimension alone but should include also a cosmic dimension.

## 2. The Apodosis: They Will Be Satisfied

The absolute use of *chortazomai* in the third person plural passive form implies that God will satisfy the hungry and thirsty. The question is, ‘With what will they be satisfied?’ In the light of Is 56:1 and Prov 21:21 (cf. Ps 17:15), God’s justice to be manifested at the end of times is not the same as that which we are exhorted to practice at the present time.<sup>65</sup> In addition to the vision of God (Ps 17: 5), messianic banquet (Ps 107:1-9; Is 25:6-8; 49: 10-13; 1 Enoch 62:14; Mt 8:11), Davies and Allison propose also a world in which righteousness dwells (Is 32:1, 16-17; and Enoch 58:4; Targum Levi 13:5; 2 Pet 3:13; Prov 21:21 [MT]).<sup>66</sup> Matthew exhorts the Christians to have the desire and longing for justice without defining what they will be filled with.

## Conclusion

Righteousness interpreted as doing the will of God takes different forms in praxis. The will of God is interpreted differently even to justify terrorism and violence. But righteousness, as interpreted by Jesus in the SM, touches upon all our relationships - to self, others, God and to the world. Moral order should influence all the areas of

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62 H. H. Wilson, *A Dictionary, Sanskrit and English*, 2 Vols., Culcutta, Hindoostanee Press, 1819, 1. 436; see also M. M. Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1970 (first Oxford Edition in 1899), 510; P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5 Vols., Pune, Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 1966, 1.1: 1.

63 T. M. Manickam, *Dharma according to Manu and Moses*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1977, 197-198.

64 N. N. Bhattacharyya, *A Glossary of Indian Religious Term and Concepts*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 1990, 52 -53.

65 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3. 376-377, 380.

66 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Saint Matthew*, 1. 453.

human life and root out all forms of injustice and oppression. The beatitude comes to ignite our heart, soul and mind so that we become hungry and thirsty to practice the righteousness demanded of us and thereby become worthy of the satisfaction it promises.

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# “Blessed Are the Merciful” (Mt 5:7)

Abilash

This beatitude entrusts us with a two-pronged mission: a radical mission of liberation from deprivation and misery, and a pastoral mission of forgiveness and reconciliation. Such a notion is a warning against a self-oriented spirituality that could make us content with a pious inner attitude of mercy devoid of any concrete actions. The beatitude under consideration entails that the poor, the suffering, and the dejected in the society become the primary beneficiaries of our mercy and service.

## Introduction

While a cursory glance at the Matthean and the Lucan beatitudes shows that both versions differ considerably, a closer examination brings to focus some unique features peculiar to both. First, Luke's beatitudes have external or material needs as their focus: the poor, the hungry, those that weep, and those who are the objects of others' hatred. But Matthew's version contains also those referring to internal qualities like mercy, purity, and peace (Mt 5:7-9). Secondly, the beatitude “Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy” (Mt 5:7) is unique to Matthew's Gospel without a parallel in the Lucan collection of Jesus' beatitudes (Lk 6:20-23). Thirdly, righteousness seems to be an important theme in Matthew's Gospel<sup>1</sup> as he adds in

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1 Out of a total of eight occurrences of *dikaïosunē* (righteousness) in the Synoptic Gospels, Mt alone has seven occurrences, and the adjective *dikaïos* (righteous) occurs seventeen times in Mt, whereas in Lk and Mk it occurs only eleven and two times respectively. See R. Morgenthaller, *Statistik des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes*, Zürich, Gotthelf-Verlag, 1958, 89.



his fourth beatitude (5:6) the word ‘righteousness’ to the parallel beatitude in Lk 6:21. Finally, Matthew has an additional beatitude in 5:10 about those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake which is again absent in the Lucan collection.

These perceived distinctions between the two versions of the beatitudes indicate that each version is by and large the result of the redactional activity by the respective evangelists. Therefore, we ask the following questions. Why does Matthew add to his collection this beatitude which finds no place in Luke’s Gospel (henceforth, Lk)? Why is the motif of righteousness so important for Matthew’s beatitudes and theology? And, is the theme of righteousness in any way related with the beatitude under our consideration: “Blessed are the merciful ...” (5:7)? In order to answer these questions, it is imperative that we first take a brief look at the total setting of the Sermon on the Mount (henceforth, SM) and the Gospel of Matthew (henceforth, Mt).<sup>2</sup>

### 1. *Sitz im Leben* of Mt

It is now widely accepted that Mt was written in the fourth quarter of the first century CE, a period in which the post-70 Rabbinic Judaism was flourishing with its insistence on the meticulous fulfillment of every law in the Torah. With the destruction of the Temple, the influence of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, headed by the high priest, waned. One of the most significant events in post – 70 Judaism is the emergence of the academy at Jamnia.<sup>3</sup> R. Johannan ben Zakkai left Jerusalem and established in Jamnia an academic Sanhedrin consisting of 72 elders, which took over the authoritative position in the Jewish community.<sup>4</sup> So, in Matthew’s time a highly aggressive and self-

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2 D. C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999. 9 has succinctly put, “The Sermon on the Mount belongs to a book apart from which it was never intended to be read.”

3 W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, Cambridge, University Press, 1964, 256; D. C. Allison, “Matthew,” in J. Barton and J. Muddiman (eds.), *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford, University Press, 2001, 844-86, 845.

4 A. G. Wright, *et al.*, “A History of Israel,” in R. E. Brown, *et al.* (eds.), *NJBC*, Bangalore, TPI, 2001, 1219-52, 1252.

conscious Pharisaism was asserting itself to guide the destiny of the Jewish people. Consequently, Judaism became a Torah-centred religion with its insistence upon the meticulous fulfillment of every minute detail of the Torah (cf. Mt 12:9-10; 15:1-2).

In this hot pursuit of blindly fulfilling every law in the Torah, love of neighbour was relegated to the background, and weightier matters of the law like justice, mercy and faith were neglected (23:23). Righteousness was a mechanical obedience to Torah without an inward faithfulness and obedience to the *spirit* of the law: love of God and love of neighbour (22:34-40). Sacrifice became more important than mercy for the Jews and for Matthew's community (cf. 9:13; 12:7). They believed that the poor, the sick, and the suffering did not deserve mercy and compassion as their present lot was the unavoidable consequence of their sin (cf. Gen 19:11; Exod 4:11; Deut 28:28 ff.). And, *to be merciful* was not desirable according to the Romans, the Jewish religious leaders, and some Greco-Roman philosophical traditions.<sup>5</sup>

It is in this context that the Matthean Jesus exhorts his followers to be obedient to the law of God by exceeding the zeal of the Pharisees for righteousness (5:20). The greater righteousness which Jesus expects of his disciples has more to do with doing good works as is described in Mt 5-7. Good works are proposed as the principal or sole reason by which people will glorify the Father in heaven (5:16). That righteousness is equivalent to good works in Mt is clear from

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5 The leaders of rabbinic Judaism were just following the accepted ethical and moral standards set by some current philosophies and the rulers of Palestine. Mercy or compassion had no place in the Romans' legal system as "Rome's iron hand had controlled the little Jewish land" for a hundred years. See M. S. Enslin, "Palestine," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 Vols., Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1951, 7.100-113, 108. Because everything was destined and had to be accepted as God's will, the Stoics also were not for compassion. "The Stoics might offer succor, but they looked askance at compassion." See S. E. Johnson & G. A. Buttrick, "The Gospel according to St Matthew," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 Vols., Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1951, vol. 7, 231-625, 284. Further, Stoicism considered *eleos* (mercy) as a sickness of the soul. See R. Bultmann, "art. *Eleos*," in *TDNT*, 2. 477-87, 478.

what follows: "unless your *righteousness* exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20); "Beware of *doing* your *righteousness* before men in order to be seen by them" (6:1); "the Pharisees do all their *deeds* to be seen by men" (23:3, 5a). In all these, righteousness is equivalent to good works, besides good intention and character.

Thus, by the addition of 5:7 to the Lucan collection of beatitudes, the author of Mt provides a corrective to the accepted ethical and moral standards of his time. There was no place for good and merciful deeds in the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. If greater righteousness demanded in Mt means good deeds, then mercy and righteousness in Mt are two sides of the same coin. It is from the perspective of this *sitz im leben* of Mt that we will do the exegesis of this beatitude: *Makarioi hoi eleēmōnes, hoti autoi eleēthēsontai* ("Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy," NRSV) and bring out its significance for us.

## 2. The Various Meanings and Usages of *Makarios* (Blessed)

A beatitude is an exclamation "that recognizes an existing state of happiness"<sup>6</sup>, beginning with the Greek adjective *makarios*. *Makarios* literally means "fortunate", "happy", "in a privileged situation", or "well-off."<sup>7</sup> The translation "fortunate", or "it will be well with", better conveys the meaning of the Hebrew *'ašrê* and its Greek translation *makarios* better than "blessed" or "happy."<sup>8</sup> In any case, *makarios* should be translated not as "happy" which is a subjective feeling, but as "blessed" because the opposite of "blessed" is not "unhappy" but "cursed" (cf. Mt 25:31-46; Lk 6:24-26).<sup>9</sup>

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6 B. T. Viviano, "The Gospel according to Matthew," in R. E. Brown, *et al.* (eds.), *NJBC*, Bangalore, TPI, 2001, 630-74, 640.

7 M. E. Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," in L. E. Keck, *et al.* (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 12 Vols., Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995, 8. 89-505, 176.

8 C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1999, 166-67.

9 M. E. Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 177.

In the Greek usage, *makarios*, a subsidiary form of *makar*, originally referred to the gods, and describes their happy state above earthly sufferings.<sup>10</sup> It was later used of humans to denote the state of godlike blessedness.<sup>11</sup> In the OT, a beatitude always refers to a person, not to a thing or a state.<sup>12</sup> In the NT, the words *makarios*, *makarizein*, and *makarismos* refer principally to the religious contentment that those who live the kingdom values experience (cf. Lk 1:48; Jas 5:11; Gal 4:15; Rom 4:6, 9). "A clear difference from the Gk. Beatitudes is that all secular goods and values are now completely subsidiary to the one supreme good, the kingdom of God."<sup>13</sup> In the Matthean and the Lucan beatitudes, the unique and special feature is the reversal of all human values where the person who has both external sufferings and interior religious dispositions is announced as blessed.

### 3. The Meaning of *eleçmones* (Merciful) and Its Various Usages

In Hebrew, the most common word for mercy is *hesed*. It can be translated as "tenderness", "kindness", "graciousness", "loving kindness", and steadfast love". The noun *hesed* occurs 245 times in the OT.<sup>14</sup> In the secular usage in the OT, there are at least four elements that constitute the concept of *hesed*: it is social, active, mutual, and enduring.

That *hesed* is constructed 25 times (Gen 19:19; 20:13; 21:23; 40:14; 47:29; Josh 2:12; etc.) with 'âûâ (to do) and 'im (with) shows that it

10 F. Hauck and G. Bertram, "art. *Makarios, Makarizo, Makarismos*," in *TDNT*, 4.362-370, 362.

11 Accordingly, parents are extolled for good children, mothers for admirable sons (cf. Lk 11:27), the bridegroom for obtaining a wonderful wife, friends for having found great happiness of love, the wealthy for their possessions, the righteous man for his piety, and the wise man for the blessings of knowledge. See F. Hauck and G. Bertram, "art. *Makarios, Makarizo, Makarismos*," in *TDNT*, 4.364.

12 Even though Ecclesiastes 10:17 mentions the blessing of the land, the reference obviously is to the inhabitants of the land. See *ibid.*, 365.

13 *Ibid.*, 368.

14 H. -J. Zobel, "art. *Hesed*," in *TDOT*, 5.44-64, 45.



is operative in the human sphere and has to do with human relationships.<sup>15</sup> Thus, *hesed* has a social or relational nature. The demonstration of *hesed* in human relationships would consist, among other things, of release of someone who could have been killed (e. g., Sarah and Abraham in Gen 20), speaking on someone's behalf (Gen 40:14), restoration to someone his ancestral property (2 Sam 9:1, 3, 7), someone being given a place at the king's table (1 Kgs 2:7), and so on and so forth.

Secondly, *hesed* includes an element of action, which is substantiated by the use of the verb 'âûâ (e. g., Zech 7:9; Ps 109:16). Neh 13:14 refers to the "good deeds that I have done" for the house of God. When the prophet Micah declares the Lord's requirement to do justice, to love kindness (*hesed*), and to walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8), "he expands the sphere of relationship of each Israelite so that *hesed* involves active concern for the well-being of all the people of God."<sup>16</sup> In short, the essence of *hesed* can be expressed as 'doing good' (Judg 8:35; 2 Sam 2:6), as *hattôbâ* also is constructed with 'âûâ and 'im (Judg 8:35).

The third characteristic of *hesed* is its reciprocity or mutuality in the sense that the one who receives *hesed* does a merciful act in return, or the one who demonstrates it can at least claim it in return. For example, King Abimelech asks Abraham for loyalty in return for the *hesed* he showed Abraham and Sarah (Gen 21:23).<sup>17</sup> Prov 3:3-4 express that those who practice *hesed* will receive favour and good repute both in the sight of God and people. The implicit idea is that good actions done out of *hesed* can or will be repaid either by God or by humankind.

Fourthly, *hesed* is enduring and permanent. That endurance or permanence is a constitutive element of mercy is shown by the phrase *hesed we'emet* in passages like Gen 24:49; 47:29; Josh 2:14. This expression is usually understood as a hendiadys in which the second

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15 For details, see *ibid.*, 46-49.

16 K. D. Sakenfeld, "Love," in *ABD*, 4.375-81, 380.

17 For more examples, see H. -J. Zobel, "art. *Hesed*," 47-48.

noun *'emet* "emphasizes the permanence, certainty, and lasting validity of the demonstration or promise of *hesed*." <sup>18</sup>

When we come to the religious usage of *hesed*, that is, when God is the subject of *hesed*, we observe the same social, active, and permanent nature of *hesed*.<sup>19</sup> However, when the concept of *hesed* is transferred to God, the secular principle of mutuality disappears. The emphasis now is on Yhwh's unconditional mercy, grace, and forgiveness. While, in the secular usage, the term *hesed* is never related to forgiveness, forgiveness is an essential aspect of divine *hesed*.<sup>20</sup> Yhwh's *hesed* finds its expression "in his endless reconciling love, always ready to forgive."<sup>21</sup> He is "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6; cf. also Num 14:18; Jer 32:18; Jon 4:2).

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that *hesed* in the OT is not a pious inner attitude, but is other-oriented and expresses itself in relationship, mutuality, love, forgiveness, and other positive actions. Keeping in mind these insights regarding the OT understanding of *hesed*, let us now see the meaning and significance of mercy in Mt.

#### 4. The Theme of Mercy in Mt

Out of 30 occurrences of the word mercy and its cognates in the synoptic Gospels, Mt has the highest with 15 occurrences.<sup>22</sup> That the theme mercy plays an important role in Matthew's theology is evident from the fact that he twice mentions Hosea's statement "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6) at 9:13 and 12:7. This quotation from Hosea is absent in the synoptic parallels (Mk 2:13-17 and Lk 5:27-32; Mk 2:23-28 and Lk 6:1-5). In his denunciation of the scribes and the Pharisees in the last discourse in chapter 23, mercy is one of the triad of the more important matters of the law (23:23). The feeding and healings by Jesus are nothing but expressions of the mercy of

18 *Ibid.*, 48.

19 For details, see *ibid.*, 54-62.

20 K. D. Sakenfeld, "Love," 379.

21 H. -J. Zobel, "art. *Hesed*," 63.

22 R. Morgenthauer, *Statistik des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes*, 94.

Jesus who is the merciful one *par excellence* (9:13, 27, 36; 14:14; 15:22, 25, 32; 17:15; 20:30-34). And, there are also a number of other passages in Mt where the motif or the ethic of mercy is prominent even though the exact term does not occur.<sup>23</sup>

### a) *The Meaning of Mercy in Mt*

What precisely does mercy mean in the First Gospel? We can comprehend the full meaning of this beatitude in Mt only when we study it in the overall context of Jesus' teaching on mercy in this Gospel.

#### i. *It implies forgiveness*

First of all, mercy refers to forgiveness of sins by God because "the commonly accepted explanation of suffering saw in it only the deserved punishment for sin."<sup>24</sup> And, a disease like blindness was regarded as God's judgment and punishment for one's sin (Gen 19:11; Exod 4:11; Deut 28:28 ff.; cf. Jn 9:2).<sup>25</sup> The word mercy is also part of a prayer made to Jesus for healing from various diseases. Every request for a healing begins with the prayer, 'Have mercy on me/us' (9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30, 31). Here mercy is invoked for forgiveness of one's sins which will consequently heal the afflicted. On the other hand, God's unconditional mercy invites us to pardon our neighbour (Mt 6:12, 14-15). In the parable of the unforgiving servant in chapter 18, mercy finds a special mention in v. 33, which implies that mercy is intrinsically related to forgiveness of one's neighbour. In this parable,

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23 Joseph shows mercy to Mary by not willing to expose her to public disgrace (1:19). In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, forgiveness is presented as an act of mercy (18:23-35, esp. 33). The landowner's generosity to pay everyone a full day's wage is clearly an act of mercy towards the poor (20:16, esp. 15). Finally, at the last judgment, it is acts of mercy and compassion towards the poor and the needy that will earn salvation (25:31-46). See R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1982, 71.

24 S. E. Johnson and G. A. Buttrick, "The Gospel according to St. Matthew," 7. 231-625, 284.

25 The book of Deuteronomy speaks of the curses and diseases that strike the people for disobedience and for not observing the commandments and decrees of God (cf. especially Deut 28:22, 35, 60, and 61).

the followers of Jesus are expected to be different from the wicked servant who refused to have mercy on his fellow servant.

## ii. It implies action

Secondly, mercy implies action in Mt. Matthew and Luke use two different Greek words for the adjective 'merciful'. While Matthew here uses *eleēmôn*, Luke uses *oiktirmôn* in Lk 6:36. Though both words are translated into English as 'merciful', a distinction can be made between the two terms. According to H. Cremer, *oiktirmôn* refers to merciful human feeling, while *eleēmôn* refers to both the attitude and the action of mercy.<sup>26</sup> In Mt, mercy is not merely an inner attitude, but something that we do concretely.<sup>27</sup> The Greek word *eleos* suggests the connotation of pouring out.<sup>28</sup> It does not stop with an emotional wave of compassion but translates itself into concrete actions.<sup>29</sup> It is only by seeing our good deeds that people will give glory to our Father in heaven (Mt 5:16b).

Mercy in this Gospel refers to love and concern for the spiritually poor (9:13) and for the physically and materially poor (12:1-8; 25:31-46). Towards the end of the Gospel, in the passage on the Last Judgment (25:31-46), the blessed by the Father (v. 34) are those who positively responded to the neighbour's material needs through an active involvement by doing good deeds.<sup>30</sup> Mt 19:21 would say that

26 As cited by G. Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary* (E. Tr. by O. C. Dean, Jr.), Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1988, 39.

27 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, 164 argues that the beatitudes (5:3-12) and the following antitheses (5:21-7:12) provide the content of good works.

28 J. C. Howell, *The Beatitudes for Today*, Louisville, John Knox Press, 2006, 65.

29 S. Galilea, *The Beatitudes: To Evangelize as Jesus Did* (E. Tr. by R. R. Barr), Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1974, 57 says, "Love never occurs chemically pure. It never occurs in isolation from its concrete expressions."

30 The emphasis on the relation between mercy and active involvement is found also in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk 10: 25-37. "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (vv. 36-37).



one must sell one's possessions and give the money to the poor in order to become perfect. So, perfection is attained through acts of mercy (cf. 5:43-48). Thus, though mercy apparently refers to an internal disposition, it is never self-oriented. It is not mere compassion or sympathy but solidarity which leads us to efficacious involvement with our neighbour.

### *iii. The centrifugal nature of Mt 5:7*

The analysis above makes it clear that the beatitude under consideration marks a departure from the previous ones in that it lays a new emphasis on other-oriented action. Whereas the first four beatitudes focused attention on a state of mind or an attitude of the individual (poverty in spirit, meekness, etc.), this beatitude refers to the blessedness of those who act, namely, those who show mercy to others.<sup>31</sup> Though the new followers of Jesus and the crowds living in the periphery of the Jewish society have not been shown mercy by the rich and the powerful (cf. Prov 14:20; 17:5a), they are exhorted to show it to others unconditionally.<sup>32</sup> While beatitudes like poverty in spirit, meekness, and purity of heart could lead to distinction between people, exclusion and division, the centrifugal nature of mercy invites, seeks after, includes, and unites all children of God without distinction.

### *iv. A beatitude meriting God's love*

This beatitude could arguably be the most noble and rewarding one of all the beatitudes because, according to the OT, it is the doer of merciful acts whom God will love more than his mother does (Sir 4:1-10, esp. 10). No wonder, then, that this is the only beatitude which has been brought by Jesus on par with justice and faith, which he declared as the weightier matters of the law (Mt 23:23). This unique significance of the beatitude is attested also by the fact that Jesus brings all his five discourses to a grand finale by naming the doers of merciful acts as righteous and by awarding them eternal life (25:46).

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31 D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC, Dallas, Word Books, Publisher, 1993, 93.

32 Jas 2:13 warns that those who do not show mercy will not receive a fair judgment.

### v. *Blessedness and mercy: a gift and a task*

That the beatitudes (5:3-11) precede the demands of the law (5:17-7:27; 25:31-46) in Mt is an indication that blessedness is a gracious gift granted unconditionally. The sick and the afflicted from Galilee, Decapolis, Judea, Jerusalem and Jordan are healed unconditionally irrespective of their religious, moral, and spiritual status (4:23-25). In Mt 5:13-14, the disciples are unconditionally declared as the salt and light of the earth even before any prior ethical and missionary demands were made on them. Even though the call to righteousness is followed by a clear emphasis upon grace (cf. 5:3-12; 9:12-13; 10:7-8; 11:28-30; 18:23-35; 20:1-16; 22:1-10; 26:26-28), the latter precedes the former.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is suggested that the indicative mood of this beatitude should “not be transformed into an imperative or exhortation.”<sup>34</sup>

However, I would argue that this beatitude (like the other ones) smacks also of an imperative or exhortation. The conjunction *hoti* (for) can be understood as both expressing result (so that) and as a causal conjunction (because, since). When it is understood as a causal conjunction, it implies that one is expected to be merciful so that s/he may obtain mercy. Therefore, human mercy can be said to have the purpose to effect God’s mercy as is implied in the parable of the judgment of the nations (25:31-46). This implication points to the kingdom also as a task to be realized. Therefore, a call to be merciful cannot altogether be ignored if one has to receive God’s mercy.

### vi. *Beneficiaries of mercy*

The merciful love God tenders to his people resembles that of a shepherd who anxiously and graciously cares for his flock (Mic 2:12; 4:6-7; Jer 23:3; 31:10; Is 40:11; 49:9-10). Nevertheless, the shepherd has a special interest in the sheep that were neglected by the careless shepherds and, therefore, have strayed (Ez 34:7-22). That the object of mercy is always those who stand in need of our merciful love is confirmed by various parables of Jesus. This fact is attested by the

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33 D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, lxiii.

34 M. E. Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 177.

immediate context of the SM, where the beneficiaries of Jesus' mercy and compassion are the large suffering crowds (Mt 5:1; cf. 4:23-25), and also by his last discourse where the poor, the orphans, the sick, and the prisoners are presented as the beneficiaries of our merciful love (25:31-46). Consequently, the beatitude under consideration entails that the poor, the suffering, and the dejected in the society become the primary beneficiaries of our mercy and service.

*b) "For They Will Receive Mercy": A Reflexive Beatitude*

One of the most significant features that make this beatitude different from the rest of the beatitudes is that this is the only one which is reflexive. A reflexive word shows that the action performed by a person inevitably leaves its effect on the person who performed it. The poor in spirit and those persecuted for righteousness' sake receive not poverty of spirit or righteousness in return, but the kingdom; the peacemakers do not receive peace as a reward, but are called the children of God; the pure in heart are not repaid with purity of heart, but with the privilege of seeing God. In contrast, those who show mercy to other fellow human beings will receive exactly what they have showed: mercy.<sup>35</sup>

**Conclusion**

Here we may draw up the hermeneutical implications for mission. We noted in the beginning of this study that the addition of this beatitude, which is absent in the Lucan collection, is Matthew's redactional activity based on his theology. By exhorting us to be merciful to others, the Matthean Jesus gives us a spirituality oriented towards the materially (doing good deeds) and the spiritually (forgiveness) needy. This means that this beatitude entrusts us with a two-pronged mission: a radical mission of liberation from deprivation and misery, and a pastoral mission of forgiveness and reconciliation. This spirituality is a warning against a self-oriented spirituality which makes us content with a pious inner attitude of mercy devoid of any concrete actions.

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35 But, unlike the element of mutuality which is present in the secular usage of *hesed* in the OT, our beatitude in Mt 5:7 says that the reward for showing mercy is granted not by the recipient of mercy but by God himself.

The gift of blessedness is graciously given to us not so much on account of a direct and vertical relationship we may have with God as on account of a spirituality of involvement.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his homily during the celebration of First Vespers of the solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, observed: "... Christ did not withdraw himself into Heaven, leaving ranks of followers to carry out "his cause" on earth. The church is not an association that desires to promote a specific cause. In her there is no question of a cause. In her it is a matter of the person of Jesus Christ, ..." <sup>36</sup> According to Mt 5:7 and the whole Gospel, in which righteousness (good deeds) is a very significant theme, I believe that the exhortation of the Pope betrays a partial understanding of the biblical teaching on mission. In the light of our exegetical findings and in the context of our country's ever increasing number of people crying for liberation of various kinds, an important missiological implication of Mt 5:7 is that it is not so much piety and loud proclamation, but good works to which we must give priority in our mission. Thus, this beatitude makes clear the Matthean priority of the deed over piety and proclamation.

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36 Pope Benedict XVI, "Paul: a nobody loved by Jesus Christ," *30 Days* 26 (2008) n. 6/7, 40-42, 42. This is an excerpt taken from the Pope's homily delivered at the Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls, Rome, June 28, 2008.



# **“Blessed Are the Peacemakers, For They Will Be Called Children of God”**

**Aloysius Xavier**

This beatitude according to the author presents a teaching of Jesus which points to a reversal of social convention. Peace is the cry of the modern world. Peacemaking involves the pursuit of justice and reconciliation. The peacemakers must have certain qualities to fulfill the task of peacemaking. They must have love, mercy and justice. Peacemaking is the responsibility of all the followers of Jesus. So, peacemakers must try to remove injustice and try to establish a just milieu. But to establish peace requires commitment which is not easy, for it is a commitment to justice; and when justice prevails there is reconciliation and reconciliation will lead to peace.

## **Introduction**

‘Blessed’ (*makarios*) is a literary form found in the Old Testament especially in the Psalms and Wisdom literature. The Hebrew term *’ašrê* is etymologically uncertain. It refers to something that is to happen in the future, the dynamic object of which is hope and quiet. It results in happiness. The very first psalm in the OT begins with *’ašrê* as a gate to enter the world of psalms. In the OT, ‘blessed’ refers to the worldly – horizontal rather than vertical.<sup>1</sup> Beatitude in the OT refers always to persons and never to thing or state. Beatitude is usually formulated in the more general third person. The form generally consisted of: a) the beatitude (blessed is the man...); b) a relative or participle clause more precisely defining the individual

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1 J.P. Prevost, *Petit Dictionnaire des psaumes*, Paris, Cerf, 1990, 27.

by describing a particular conduct of that individual (who walks not in the counsel of the wicked...); and frequently c) the basis for the blessing describing or stating its content.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Blessed Are the Peacemakers

The seventh beatitude in the Matthean beatitudes is about the peace-makers and that they will be called the children of God (Mt 5:9). In the OT, the beatitude is something beneficial to the temporal life, whereas the NT beatitude pertains to an eschatological reward. Grammatically the beatitude is well structured. The predicate *makarios* is placed first, then the person with an article and finally the reason for the blessedness or the description of it in a subsidiary clause.<sup>3</sup> The beatitude which appears in the Sermon on the Mount in Mathew 5-7 is very familiar to the readers of the NT. The beatitudes in Mt 5:3-12 can be divided into three groups. First group refers to those individuals whose lot is evil. They are poor, mourners and hungry. The second group refers to the individuals who in someway exhibit God's attitude of mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking. In the third group are the ambassadors of Jesus whose sufferings will be comparable to those of the prophets.<sup>4</sup>

#### a) 'Peace' – the Semitic Meanings

The word *Shalom*, meaning peace is used widely in the OT. It occurs 237 times in Hebrew OT. The root *slm* is attested since earliest times in all the branches of Semitic language, in a wealth of forms with a broad range of meanings. In Hebrew, whether the root of the word *shalom* displays a nominal or verbal usage is disputed. In Ugaritic, *slm* has a range of meanings. It could mean: to be intact, whole, peace, peace-offering, sacrifice, paid, settled and welfare. In Akkadian the word means friendliness, friendly, peaceful, make friendly, be intact, whole etc. In Syriac it means harmony, peace and

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2 R.A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?" *JBL* 95 (1976) 417.

3 F. Hauck and G. Bertram, "art. *Makarios, Makarizo, Makarismos*," in *TDNT*, 4.362-370.

4 L. Mowry, "Beatitudes," in *IDB*, 1. 371.

welfare. In South Arabic, it means peace, peaceful and making peace. In Arabic, it refers to a person who lives in harmony with others. With these different meanings in different Semitic languages *Ḍālôm* has a semantic breadth that can not be conveyed adequately by any single English word. “*Ḍālôm* is a comprehensive expression denoting all that the people of ancient Near East wish for as the substance of blessing. It is a state of being unimpaired and unthreatened, of ease and security, of felicity and wholeness in the broadest sense.”<sup>5</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible, the word *ḏālôm* gets different nuances in different books of the Bible. In Pentateuch, *ḏālôm* is used as a salutation or greeting. And that is why the brothers of Joseph did not greet Joseph *ḏālôm* because of their hatred towards him (Gen 37:9). *Ḍālôm* meant “state of well being”, “of being alive”, or could be used as a leave taking formula (Gen 43: 27-28; Ex 4:18). In Deuteronomistic literature *ḏālôm* makes a shift to the political realm. But the word acquires both a theological connotation and a theological character when it is associated with Yhwh. In the book of Judges we read “Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord is peace” (Judg 6:24). Deutero-Isaiah says, “Peace will be like a river if one keeps the commandments of Yhwh.”<sup>3</sup> (Is 48:18). Joy is an essential element of peace (Is 55:12). *Ḍālôm* means freedom from all that causes grief. Yhwh promises to extend *ḏālôm* like a river (Is 66:12). According to Isaiah peace accomplished by Yhwh means general well being, including the alleviation of poverty, when the wealth of the nations flow to Jerusalem (Is 48:18; 60:5). In this act of Yhwh his motherliness is experienced (Is 66: 13). *Ḍālôm* is God’s loving favour towards his people.<sup>6</sup> In the prophetic literature *ḏālôm* is complete wellbeing and Yhwh is giving that peace (Jer 29:7). The covenant of peace is an assurance of peace.

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5 J. Stendebach, “art. *Ḍālôm*,” in *TDOT*, 15. 13-49, 19. See further, he observes, “For the present we may conclude that *ḏālôm* is a profoundly positive concept associated with the notions of intactness, wholeness, and well-being, of the world and humanity. It must be satisfied and restored when it is compromised or violated” (19).

6 *Ibid.*, 36.

In the book of psalms we see the people were asked to seek peace. "Seek peace and pursue it" (Ps 34:14). Peace refers to the right order of the world (Ps 72:37). Ps 85 expresses *ḏālôm* as a most comprehensive term to represent the successful, undisturbed and salvific effectiveness. *Ḍālôm* is a word of blessing invoked upon the chosen people of God (Ps 125:15; 128:6). *Ḍālôm* is everything worth striving for. It encompasses a long and full life, good reputation in the sight of God and of people, well being both in individual and social sphere. So, in the OT, the idea of *ḏālôm* in its various manifestations is sustained by Yhwh.

In the NT, the Greek word used is *ειρήνη*. It translates the Hebrew word *Ḍālôm*.<sup>7</sup> The basic feature of the Greek word *ειρήνη* is "that word does not primarily denote a relationship between several people or an attitude but a state, i.e., 'a time of peace' or 'state of peace,' .... It can also signify a peaceful attitude."<sup>8</sup> In the NT there are many texts which refer this word to peaceful attitude within people. In the NT, the word, *ειρήνη*, can be understood both negatively and positively. Negatively, peace is just absence of aggression, an aversion for quarrel. Positively, peace denotes a desire for tranquility and conciliation. To be in peace is to live in peace and to be in peace with all. This idea is found in Rom 12:18; 14:19; 2Cor 13:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14. Who are the peaceful? In general the beatitudes refer to *anawim* of Yhwh. All the beatitudes one by one refer to the people with strong religious sentiments. They are the poor, the mourning, the meek, those who love their neighbor, the merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers.

### **b) The Peacemakers**

The nominal, peacemakers (*ειρηνοποιοι*), is used only in Mt 5:9 in the whole of NT. A verbal equivalent is found in Col 1:20. Against the background of rabbinic literature the term can be understood as the establishment of peace and concord between people. In the OT we see people understood that Yhwh is the source of peace and people were praying to Yhwh for peace (Judg 6:23f; Job 30:2; Ps

7 W. Foerster, "art. *Ειρήνη*," in *TDNT*, 2.400-402, 406-417, 411.

8 *Ibid.*, 400-401.



35:27; 1Kings 2:33; Ps 122:6). This idea is well expressed in Ps 85:8-10: "Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, those who turn to him in their hearts...righteousness and peace will kiss each other." This idea is found Is 52:7; Lev 26:3-6 and Num 6:26: "The Lord will lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."

Beyond the idea that the Lord Yhwh is the source of peace, the expression that he is a peace maker is found only in rabbinic literature. The word peacemaker is not directly an attribute to God or Messiah. In the 1Chron 22:9, Solomon is said to be the one who is blessed with peace and this idea comes close to that of peacemaker. In Isaiah 9:6 the messianic child is a man of peace. In rabbinic literature, the word *ḥāšôm asha* refers to men as peacemakers. For Rabbis peace is opposed to strife and not merely nations. Thus we have frequent and emphatic references to the making of peace between people. For Hillel, Aaron was model of one who pursued peace.<sup>9</sup> For Rabbis, peacemaking is clearly different from imposing peace by force. For, peacemaking is an act of love, humility and self denial.

In Hellenistic culture, outside NT, it was thought that only kings like Alexander and Roman emperors would bring peace. The peacemaking was considered the responsibility of those who were in authority. The peacemaking was the title of the Roman emperor and *Pax Romana* was considered the achievement of a ruler.<sup>10</sup> Hence,

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9 W. Foerster, "art. *Eirēnē*," in *TDNT*, 2.409-410. "One might almost say that the role which peacemaking assumes among the Rabbis comes nearest to the NT concept of love and takes the place in later Judaism which the requirement of love occupies in the NT.... It is not a matter of seeking the *shalom* or salvation of one's neighbour, but of seeking *shalom* in the sense of the end of strife.... This leads to a use of *shalom* which we do not find in the OT, namely, for the relationship between God and man."

10 H.D. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, 138. "In Hellenistic literature outside the New Testament the honorific epithet, 'The peacemaker' (*ho eirēnopoios*) carries special weight in the language of ruler-cult notions." See again, "The connection with ruler cult is reflected in Antony's funerary speech.... 'peacemaker of inhabited world' was a royal epithet (*Dio Cassius* 72.15.5)" (138, fn. 363).

the royal title. The word of court milieu has been shifted to social milieu. According to Betz, a further reading of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:21-48) represents six cases of peacemaking although the term peacemaking is not used. They all belong to family and friendship. The issues concerning forgiveness (Mt 6:12, 14-15), and judging (7:1-5) are also related to peacemaking. All these instances involve repairing relationships between individuals, not between political bodies or social classes. Seen from this angle political involvement lies outside the concerns of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>11</sup> So the beatitude on peacemakers comes out of political involvement and points out to the instance where peace making is necessary. In day to day life, in the family and society, the peacemakers have a role to play.

In Hellenistic culture *Pax Romana* was appreciated. Peacemaking in the society was valued very much. *Pax Romana* meant that Romans understood the very essence of the rule was to maintain and preserve peace in the empire. Whereas, making peace between groups, within families or between individuals, is considered a task of the philosophers.<sup>12</sup> J. Dupont emphasizes that the basic requirement for the peacemaker is love.

## 2. The Reward of Peacemaking

The reward for peace makers is that they shall be called children of God (sons of God). The fulfillment is eschatological, assuring that the honorific title 'sons of God' will be conferred on the faithful in paradise. Not every one will be honored with the title 'sons of God' but only those who work towards peace among others.<sup>13</sup> The

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11 *Ibid.*, 139.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, 141. The beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount makes two statements: a) It clearly regards its fulfillment as eschatological event, assuming that the honorific name 'sons of God' will be conferred on the faithful in paradise; b) It stipulates that not every Jew is entitled to the name, but that only those who qualify, who meet the terms of v. 9a: "for it is they who will be called 'sons of God.'" See J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, London; SCM Press, 1975, 181. "It should however be noted that the expression 'children

peacemakers will be the sons of God because God himself has set his example. He acts as the great peacemaker.<sup>14</sup> They will be called sons of God as the mourners will be comforted (5:4), those who hunger for righteousness will be filled (5:6), and the merciful will receive mercy (5:7). It is an act of God.<sup>15</sup> The promise that the peacemakers will be called the sons of God has great significance. At the eschatological event, the peacemakers will be given a new name. They will be called the children of God. It means they will be sons and daughters of God.<sup>16</sup> The two terms 'peacemakers' and 'sons of God' are correlative. Only a son of God possesses the necessary power to make peace prevail among the people.<sup>17</sup>

The term 'sons of God' is found in Deut 14:1: "You are children of the Lord your God" (see also Hos 1:10; Wis 5:5). Who are these sons of God? It is a title given to the members of the celestial court; the king who represents divine authority. It shows close relationship between the elected race and God. It is faithful Israel who can be called sons of God. Mathew quotes Hos 11:1 in 23:17. "I have called my son from Egypt." We see many texts in the OT which give the idea of father-son relationship between God and his people. God asked Nathan to inform David that he will raise up an offspring and "I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me." (2 Sam 7:14; cf. 1

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(*uioi*) of God' occurs only three times in the synoptic gospels (Mt 5:9, 45 par Lk 6:35; 20:36) and has eschatological significance in all three passages....being a child of God is not a gift of creation, but an eschatological gift of salvation."

14 H.D. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 141. "Cf. the epithet 'the God of peace' (Rom 15:33; 1Cor 14:22; 2Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16; Heb 13:20).

15 J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, Paris, J. Gabalda, 1973, 3.665: "pas question ici de la bonne réputation que les artisans de paix s'attireront de la part des hommes."

16 *Ibid.*, 3.665, fn.3. "Very often the emphasis (in *kaleô*) is to be placed less on the fact that the bearer of the name is such and such, than on the fact that the bearer of the name actually is what the name says about him. The passive *be named* thus approaches closely the meaning *to be...*"

17 *Ibid.*, 3.655, fn. 4.

Chron 17:13; 22:10). Ben Sirach too tells us who the son of God is. After enumerating the duties towards the poor and the oppressed the author says, "Be a father to the orphans, and be like a husband to their mother; you will then be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than does your mother (4:10).

Coming to Matthew the author uses the term children of God only twice in his gospel: 5:9 and 5:45. Jesus says: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:45). In the beatitude (5:9) peacemaking is the condition by which we become children of God, whereas, here loving one's enemies is the necessary requirement to be the children of Father in heaven. Dupont observes that love is a quality required of the peace makers also.<sup>18</sup> Another requirement for the peace making is that one be merciful. When peacemakers enable peace to prevail between the quarreling factions their action reflects merciful actions of God towards his people. The common element between the peacemaking and divine filiation is to be found in mercy, that is love.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

1. The Sermon on the Mount is one of those discourses that consolidate the teaching of Jesus. Here Jesus proposes a programme of life to his followers. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the beatitudes. These beatitudes are an overture to the series of teachings Jesus gives to his disciples.<sup>20</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt 5:9) is a teaching of Jesus which points to a reversal of social convention. At the time of Jesus emperors and rulers were considered as peacemakers. *Pax Romana* was a great achievement of the Roman Empire. Peacemaker was used as

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18 *Ibid.*, 664, "Mt 5:9 n'emploie pas le mot 'charité,' mais nous avons vu que ce terme exprime bien l'angle sous lequel il faut apprécier l'action des artisans de paix... D'une manière comme l'autre, charité et filiation divine ont partie liée."

19 *Ibid.*

20 J. Pathrapankal, *The Christian Programme A Theological and Pastoral Study of the Sermon on the Mount*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1999, 49, 107.



a title for the emperor in the imperial cult. But now the task is entrusted to the followers of Jesus and the peacemakers are blessed. The task of the emperor is now shifted to the *anawim*, the poor.

2. The peacemakers will be called the children of God. Once again, the title given to the celestial beings and kings, later to Israel is given to the peacemakers. The peacemakers must have certain qualities to fulfill the task of peacemaking. They must have love, mercy and justice.<sup>21</sup>

3. Peacemaking is the responsibility of all the followers of Jesus. Peace is the cry of the modern world. Peacemaking involves the pursuit of justice and reconciliation. As long as there is injustice, exploitation, cheating, squandering of resources, short supply of food, exploitation of poor by rich, suppression of the legitimate rights of the poor, there can not be peace in the world. A hungry man is an angry man. Economic imbalance disturbs the peace. So, peacemakers must try to remove injustice and try to establish a just milieu. But to establish peace requires commitment which is not easy. If justice prevails, it will lead to reconciliation and reconciliation to peace. "Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Is 32:16-18).

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21 J.H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, Westminster, John Knox Press, 183-184. 'Peacemaking' points to explanatory parallels within the Sermon on the Mount, such as a) Mt 5:23-24 - a demand for reconciliation; b) 5:38-42, 44-48 - love of one's enemies; c) 5:21-48 - repairing relationships; d) 6:12, 14-15 - forgiveness of wrongs; and e) 7:1-5 - refusal to judge."

# **“Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness’ sake, For Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven”**

**Victor Rebello**

The eighth Beatitude announces an eschatological blessing on those who are persecuted not so much because they *are* persecuted but because they are *committed* to righteousness in spite of being persecuted. The disciples because of their suffering in the cause of righteousness are worthy successors of the martyred as John the Baptist and Jesus. It is not a question of the Christians being required to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees quantitatively. The difference must be qualitative. Their obedience must be to the spirit of the Torah as revealed to them by Jesus, not merely to the letter as strictly construed by their opponents. Not bad theology but bad behavior will result in exclusion from the kingdom.

## **Introduction**

In the context of the recent violence against Christians in Orissa and elsewhere persecution has once again taken the limelight. The reasons are varied – social, economical, political, religious etc. Many feel victimized or persecuted but 1Peter 3:13 reminds us, “Who can harm you if you devote yourselves to doing good? If you suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.” The struggle against the unrighteous, unjust oppressive structures must continue. The eighth Beatitude brings to focus that the eschatological blessing results not because a group is subjected to persecution but because the group is committed to righteousness in spite of it being persecuted. The promise

of this beatitude, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”, provides an *inclusio* with that of the first beatitude. Also this beatitude offers an easy transition to vv. 11-12 which continue the theme persecution. J. Bligh<sup>1</sup> is of the opinion that vv. 11-12 act as a commentary on the beatitude as found in v. 10 and forms a small symmetrical pattern with it.

### 1. The Persecuted Ones

The Psalms and the book of Wisdom that speak of the sufferings of the righteous contain references to the persecuted as being among God’s favourite. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones not one of them is broken.” (cf. Ps 34:19-20; Ps 22); “The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.” (cf. Wis 3:1; Wis 2:10-24)<sup>2</sup> Matthew significantly uses the word *dediôgmenoi* (cf. Mt 5:10), the perfect participle passive of the verb *diôkô* meaning pursue, persecute. The verb is not found in Mark, but is found in Matthew 6 times, in Luke 3 times, 3 times in John and 9 times in Acts.<sup>3</sup> The perfect tense indicates the present state resulting from a past action, conveying practically “those who bear the wounds of persecution.”<sup>4</sup> The word may not refer to killing as such, but may refer to continuous harassment (cf. Mt 10:23; 23:34).<sup>5</sup> The Psalms put forth the notion of religious persecution as an offence on the part of the persecutors.<sup>6</sup> In Matthew too, the word *diôkô* is utilized in the

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- 1 J. Bligh, *The Sermon on the Mount - a Discussion on Mt 5-7*, Slough, St. Paul Publications, 1975, 56; M. E. Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *NIB*, 8, 180.
  - 2 E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (E. Tr. by D. E. Green), London, John Knox Press, 1975, 95.
  - 3 O. Knoch, “art. *Diôkô*,” in *EDNT*, 1.338-339, 338-339.
  - 4 M. Zerwick and M. Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, Roma, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, <sup>5</sup>1996, 10; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC, London, T & T Clark, 1. 459.
  - 5 R. H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., <sup>2</sup>1994, 72.
  - 6 A. Oepke, “art. *Diôkô*,” in *TDNT*, 1.229-230, 229.

sense of religious persecution implying culpability on the part of the persecutors (Mt 10:23; 23:34; Jn 5:16; 15:20; Acts 7:52; 9:4; Gal 1:13 etc).<sup>7</sup>

The Christians of Matthew's community perhaps, saw themselves symbolized in the suffering righteous man of the OT. Perhaps this reflected the happenings in Matthew's church which was formally attached to the synagogue, but which later, with the onset of persecutions separated from Judaism.<sup>8</sup> The Beatitude could also give a hint into the community's life of discipline and social ostracism endured by them for their unusual way of living Judaism.<sup>9</sup> That the community experiences persecution is also manifested in the mission discourse, "Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake... (Mt 10:17ff).<sup>10</sup>

## 2. The Righteous Ones

The Hebrew word used for the Righteous is *sedeq*. Who is the just or the righteous or what is said to be righteous? The OT gives us various nuances of the term. The Psalms speak of the Lord as the righteous one Lord being the lover of righteous deeds (cf. Ps 11:7; 112:4; 116:5; 119:137; 129:4; 145:17). In the Psalms, in the context of God's action of bringing salvation, the words *sedeq* and *šċdâqâ* occur 49 and 34 times respectively. Very often they refer to proper order and behavior. The Psalmist requests God to judge him according to his integrity and innocence (cf. Ps 7:8). While referring to God's Law, the psalmist praises the laws of God's righteousness (vv. 7, 62, 164); God's ordinances, testimonies, and commandments are righteousness (vv. 75, 144, 172). The saving action of God is said to refer to divine order, and God's teaching is the truth. The context of

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7 *Ibid.*, 230.

8 J. P. Meier, *Matthew*, Dublin, Veritas Publications, 1980, 42.

9 D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1991, 80.

10 G. Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount, an Exegetical Commentary* (E. Tr. by O.C. Dear, Jr.), Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1988, 42.



psalm 119 is proper order in accordance with the prescriptions of God's law. Anyone who stands blamelessly in the company of God and does deeds that are good may stay in God's tent and may dwell on his holy hill (Ps 15:2). The priests are to be clothed with righteousness (Ps 132:9), that is, they must conform themselves to appropriate liturgical and moral order.<sup>11</sup>

Deut 4:8 speaks of the statutes and ordinances of Israel as being righteous, "And what great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" The individual is said to be righteous. In Deut 16:19 and 25:1, the righteous is one who is without fault. It is he who stands in the court and deserves exoneration. Is 40-66 contains references to righteousness as denoting proper conduct or order. In Is 48:18, God laments that if only Israel had hearkened to his commandments, peace would have been theirs like a river and righteousness as the waves of the sea. People are called upon to observe righteousness, namely conduct themselves as is proper because God's saving action is about to be revealed (cf. Is 56:1). God laments over the misguided righteousness. The people fast and perform ritual penance, thinking that all should go well with them but God says mere ritual without concern for the oppressed, the hungry, the homeless, the naked is a violation of proper order. Yet if the people of Israel strive towards proper social order then "shall your righteousness go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your guard" (cf. Is 58:6-9).<sup>12</sup>

The proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (cf. Ezek 18: 2; Jer 31:29) is shattered by Ezekiel. Ezekiel describes proper conduct as each one's personal responsibility. A catalogue of acts lists what the righteous one does (Cf. Ezek 18:5-9). Thus according to Ezekiel, the righteous one takes responsibility for his own actions and is blameless before God. In the book of Genesis we find Abraham pleading for the righteous. Once again we see here, that the righteous is one on whom you can impute no guilt (cf. Gen 18:22-32). The book of Proverbs and the

11 J. J. Scullion, "art. Righteousness," in *ABD*, 5.724-736, 728-729.

12 *Ibid.*, 729-730.

Psalms very often mention the just or the righteous one, but these two books do not make explicit as to what makes a person righteous. It is the righteous person's way of life and its consequences that is continuously contrasted with that of the wicked or the unrighteous (cf. Proverbs 10–15; Ps 1:5, 6). The Psalmist says the righteous will thrive (cf. Ps 72:7; 92:12–13), be exalted (cf. Ps 75:10). They are called to delight and exclaim, being positive about God's saving action (cf. Ps 64:10; 68:3).<sup>13</sup>

### *a) Righteousness as Just Judgment and Rule*

The Greek term used in the NT for Righteousness is *dikaïosunē*. One of the occasional references to righteousness in the NT is to the just judgment of God which will be exercised by Christ at the moment of his second coming (cf. Acts 17:31; Rev 19:11). 2Pet 1:1 makes a reference to the just rule of God exercised in the act of guiding the community. We have another isolated example of this use in Heb 11:33, where a reference is made to the justice of rulers and kings.<sup>14</sup>

### *b) Righteousness as the Right Conduct before God*

Righteousness often refers to the right conduct of a person who follows the will of God and is pleasing to Him. It stands for integrity of life before God. Thus Righteousness is closely connected with the fact of intimate relationship with God. The word *dikaïosunē* is a major theological motif in Matthew. For Matthew the way of the Lord which is proclaimed by John the Baptist (cf. Mt 3:3; 11:10) and which represented his demand for repentance has a direct bearing on the way of Jesus, the way of righteousness. The 'way of righteousness' expresses the righteous demand of God towards humankind. It is the substance of the will of God. God desires righteousness as the salvation of humankind. Its realization in the word and activity of Jesus has already begun and it becomes for us now a condition for our realization of salvation (cf. Mt 5:20).<sup>15</sup>

In Mt. 3:15 righteousness refers to doing the revealed will of God.<sup>16</sup> Jesus by presenting himself for baptism stresses as his mission right

13 *Ibid.*, 730.

14 G. Schrenk, "art. *Dikaïosunē*," in *TDNT*, 2.192–210, 198.

15 K. Kertelge, "art. *Dikaïosunē*," in *EDNT*, 1.325–330, 329.

conduct which he will fulfill and which will be acceptable to God. According to Mt 5:6, the supreme goal of righteousness is right state before God. We can do nothing to merit it but is freely given to us by God as a gift.<sup>17</sup> Mt. 5:20 echoes the theme — the righteousness of Jesus' followers must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees in order for them to enter the kingdom of heaven — that could also refer to the OT emphasis, continued in Judaism, on *dikaïosunē* as the ethical response to God in terms of what his will expects of humans. D.R.A. Hare<sup>18</sup> mentions that in Mt 5:20

there is no question of allusion to God's saving righteousness or the righteousness based on faith. Attention is focused entirely on human obedience to God's will. The righteousness of Jesus' followers much exceeds even the high level of it attained by the rigorist opponents. It is not a question of the Christians being required to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees quantitatively. The difference must be qualitative. Their obedience must be to the spirit of the Torah as revealed to them by Jesus, not merely to the letter as strictly construed by their opponents. Not bad theology but bad behavior will result in exclusion from the kingdom.

In Mt 6:1-18 righteousness means actively doing the will of God. In Mt 6:1, the practice of piety with special reference to almsgiving, is typical of the special sense of *ḥṣḏâqâ* and, therefore, of *dikaïosunē* that developed in Judaism. Mt 6:1 refers to the exercises and expressions of piety. The command in 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom and the righteousness of him [God]" with the promise "and all these things shall be yours as well", parallels *dikaïosunē* with Jesus' central message of the kingdom. If the kingdom is God's reign that breaks in by divine action, then God's righteousness here would be a vindicating, saving work of God (Cf. Mt 12:28). In 6:33 righteousness concerns

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16 M. E. Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 8.160.

17 G. Schrenk, "art. *Dikaïosunē*," in *TDNT*, 2.198.

18 D. R. A. Hare, *Matthew, Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville, John Knox Press, 1993, 49.

that which brings the disciple into harmony with the will of God. Righteousness is here closely linked with God and His kingdom, again as a pure gift from God, like everything connected with the kingdom. When "John came to you in the way of righteousness" (Mt 21:32), he demanded righteousness of life in accordance with the will of God. The above meanings of the word righteousness as found in the Gospel according to Matthew do not completely exhaust the concept of righteousness; yet they provide distinctive illustrations of righteousness as action before and for God.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Righteousness as the Ground of Persecution

The persons who are marked out to be recipients of the eschatological blessing are not composed of the oppressed *per se*, but those who are unjustly persecuted because of their commitment, their pursuit of righteousness. Thus an attitude that can be termed as righteousness, is the reason cited by the evangelist for the outbreak of persecution. According to R. H. Gundry, righteousness refers to its usual connotation; the right conduct of the disciple reveals a two fold reference to a) Ps 15:1 "O Lord... who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who ... does righteousness", and b) Is 51:7a, "Listen to me you who know righteousness, a people in whose heart is my law."<sup>20</sup> According to Davies and Allison,<sup>21</sup>

*heneken* most naturally implies that 'righteousness' is the occasion or the cause of persecution ... for *dikaiosisunç* 'righteousness' can here only be something people have, namely, their obedient, righteous conduct... so in 5:10 'righteousness' has demonstrably to do with God's demand, not God's gift.

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19 G. Schrenk, "art. *Dikaiosisunç*," in *TDNT*, 2.199.

20 R. H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 72.

21 W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC, London, T&T Clark, 1.459-460.



According to Hare<sup>22</sup> the phrase "for righteousness' sake" seems to be unclear. He says

'For the sake of' can point either to the cause or to the occasion of persecution. Put in other words, it can refer to the motivation of the persecuted or of the persecutors. A similar ambiguity is presented by 1Peter 4:16: "yet if one suffers as a Christian". Here it is not clear whether the adversaries are hostile to the Christians' religion or simply resentful of their restrained behavior. Christians would insist that their conduct was the direct product of their faith and would therefore regard the persecution as caused by their commitment to Christ, but their enemies in the polytheistic environment may have cared very little about their strange beliefs. In Matthew's understanding, therefore, the beatitude may declare blessed either those who are maligned simply because of their good behavior as in 1 Peter or those whose faith in Christ (for whose sake they are righteous) arouses antipathy. The latter seems the more likely. In this case the eighth beatitude anticipates the "on my account" of the ninth.

The disciple finds encouragement when he finds himself in a situation of persecution because of his/her commitment to righteousness. It also lays a demand upon him/her not to leave the standard of righteousness when under persecution, for the assurance of the kingdom of heaven is for the "righteous"<sup>23</sup>. Just as striving for righteousness - "For I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (cf. Mt 5:20) and again "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (cf. Mt 6:33; also 5:6, 20; 6:1; 7:21-23) - is at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, so is persecution for the sake of that aim the highest test and virtue.<sup>24</sup>

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22 D. R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, 42.

23 G. Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount, an Exegetical Commentary*, 42-43.

24 H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, 146.

There seems to be a close connection between “for righteousness’ sake” (v. 10) and “on my account” (v. 11). The same adverb *heneken* appears in both places. It indicates that righteousness is not a theoretical concept for Matthew, but has a Christological underpinning and is a pointer towards the implicit Christology of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>25</sup> Matthew has changed Q’s “on account of the Son of Man” (cf. Lk 6:22) to “on my account” to highlight the personal bonding between Jesus and his disciples. To suffer for righteousness (v. 10) is for the Christian disciple to suffer for Jesus.<sup>26</sup> At the moment of Jesus’ baptism itself, his mission is oriented towards the ‘righteous’ which is to be ‘fulfilled’ (cf. Mt 3:15). ‘Righteousness’ now becomes the curriculum of Jesus.<sup>27</sup> His healings become manifestations of his righteousness, which invited which the wrath of the Jews (Jn 5:16 says that “the Jews persecuted Jesus” because of the healings on the Sabbath). A parallel is drawn between the disciples and the OT prophets who were persecuted because of their striving for righteousness (social and judicial) (cf. Acts 7:52; Lk 11:49; Mt 23:34). The disciples because of their nearness to Jesus are worthy successors of the martyred prophets, as were John the Baptist (cf. Mt 17:9-13) and Jesus (Cf. Mt 23:29-39).<sup>28</sup> The close proximity between the disciple and the teacher is stressed by Jesus in Mt 10:24. Then again in Jn 15:20 Jesus reminds his disciples that a “servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you...” St. Paul writing to Timothy cautions us that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (cf. 2 Tim 3:12).

## Conclusion

There can be no compromise on the righteousness that is demanded of every disciple of Jesus. The fear of persecution too cannot deter a disciple from his commitment to Jesus - ‘The Righteous One.’ Integrity of one’s conduct and commitment to the divine will

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25 M. E. Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 8.180.

26 J.P. Meier, *Matthew*, 42-43.

27 K. Kertelge, “art. *Dikaioσunē*,” in *EDNT*, 1.329.

28 J.P. Meier, *Matthew*, 43.

alone can set the tone of righteousness as laid down by the Master for his disciples. Ultimately, 'by this they will be known as my disciples' if they conduct themselves in all righteousness in spite of persecution. For Jesus' promise of the Kingdom of Heaven is made to such as these.

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## Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , 6 Vols., N. Freedman (ed.)
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R.W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , Chicago, 1961.
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 3 Vols., H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.)
ICC	The International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , 4 Vols., G. A. Buttrick (ed.)
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> , 12 Vols., L. Keck (ed.)
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NJBC	<i>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i> , R.E. Brown <i>et al.</i> (eds.)
NT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
RB	Revue biblique
SBFLA	Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus
SP	Sacra Pagina
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10 Vols., G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.)
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 15 Vols., G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.) and also H.-J. Fabry (ed.) from Vol. 7 onwards
TLNT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i> , 3 Vols., C. Spicq (ed.)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary